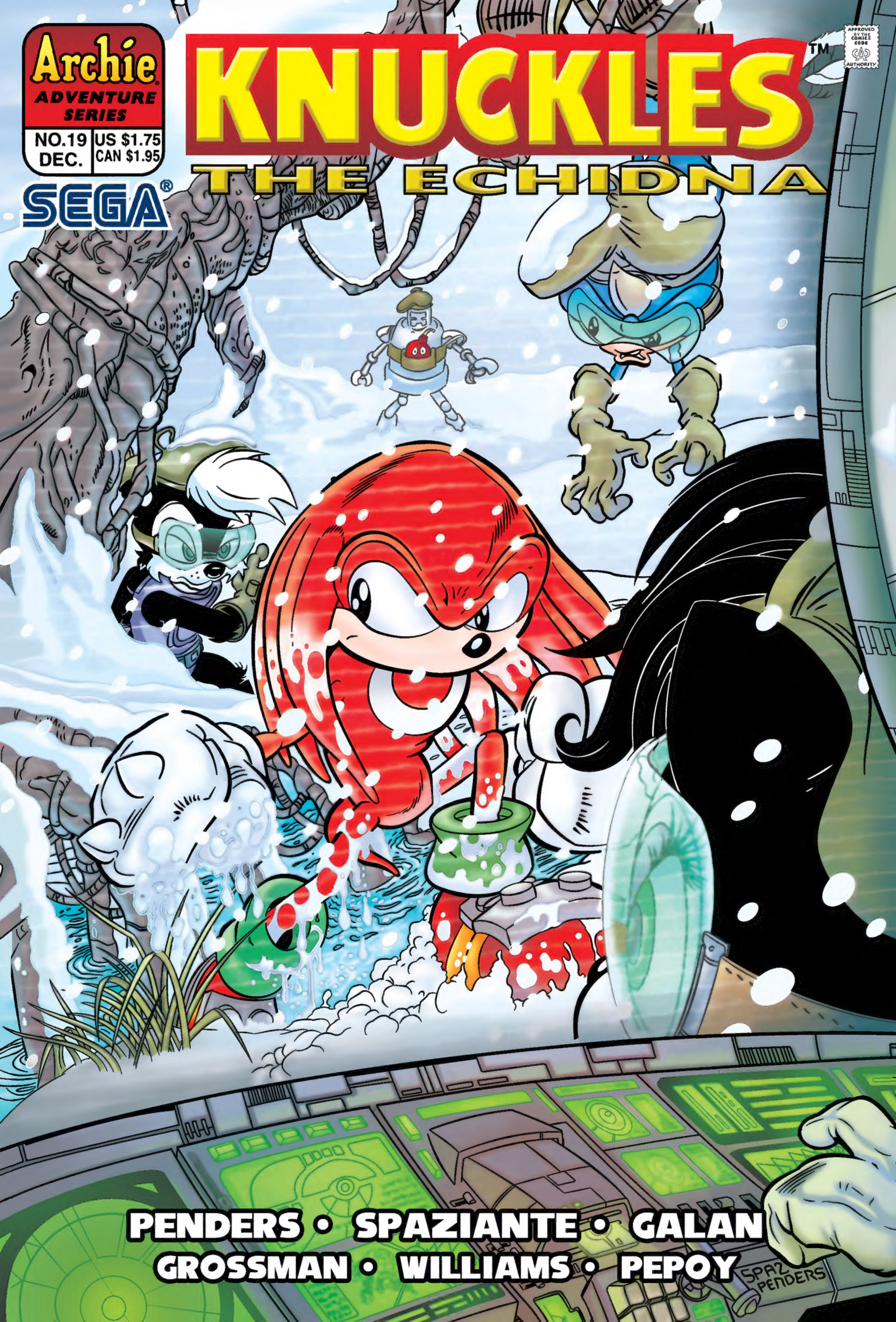
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THE ECHIDNA
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BOOK NINETEEN

The Forbidden Zone
Part One of Three

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Editor

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Born to the most noble of Echidna houses, the latest to continue the family heritage and responsibility as **GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND,** defender of all the forces of evil from the world beyond as well as those who would threaten within, he is none other than... **KNUCKLES THE ECHIDNA!**

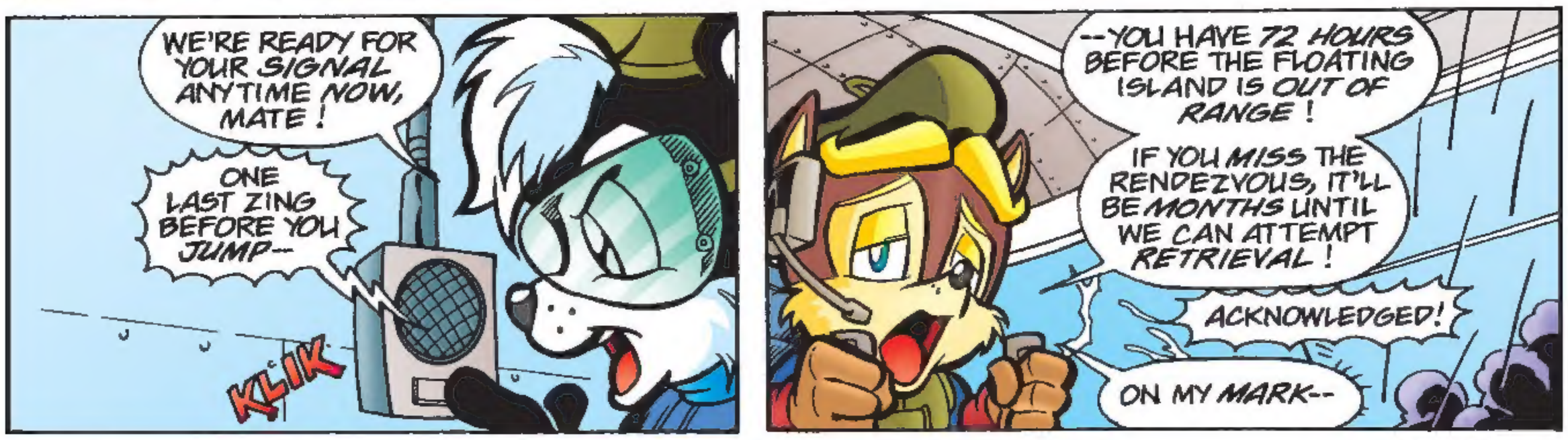
Many years ago, during the **Great War,** when **Princess Sally** was but an infant, **King Acorn** sent his wife **Queen Alicia** to The Floating Island in order to insure the safety of his Queen and **the future of Mobotropolis**. It resulted in failure.

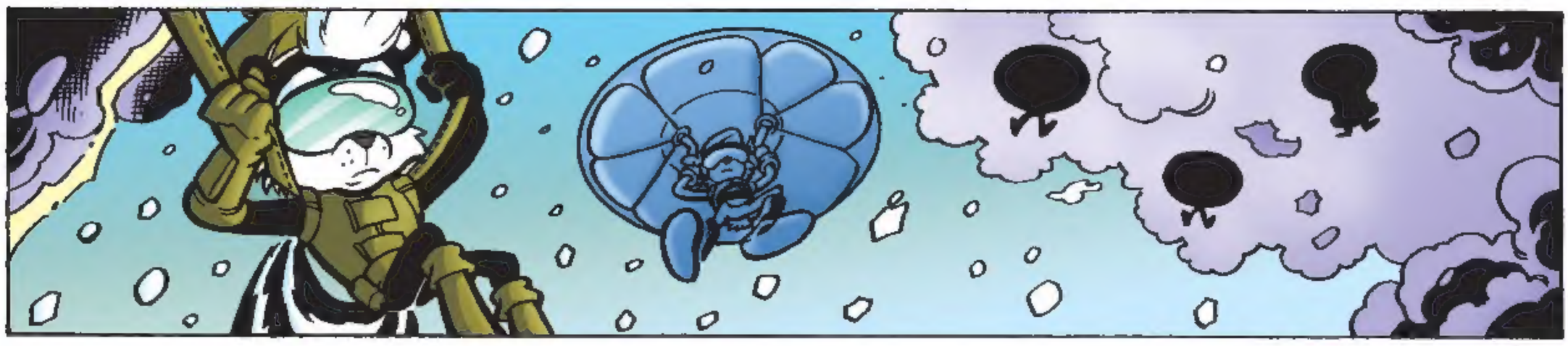
Recently, the newly-returned, now-healthy King assigned a squad of his elite commandos to return to The Floating Island and ascertain the true fate of his loved ones.

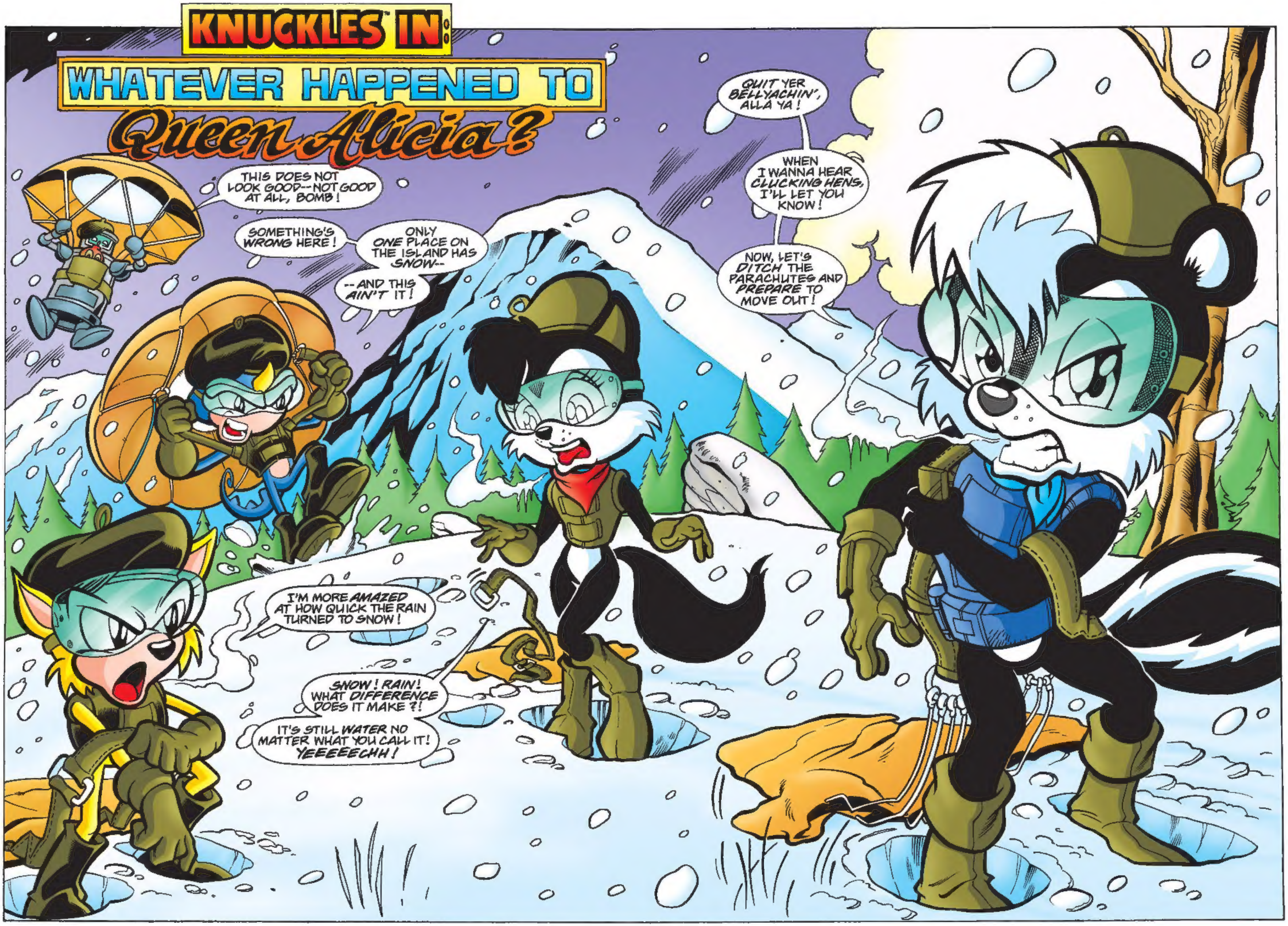
It is here our tale begins...

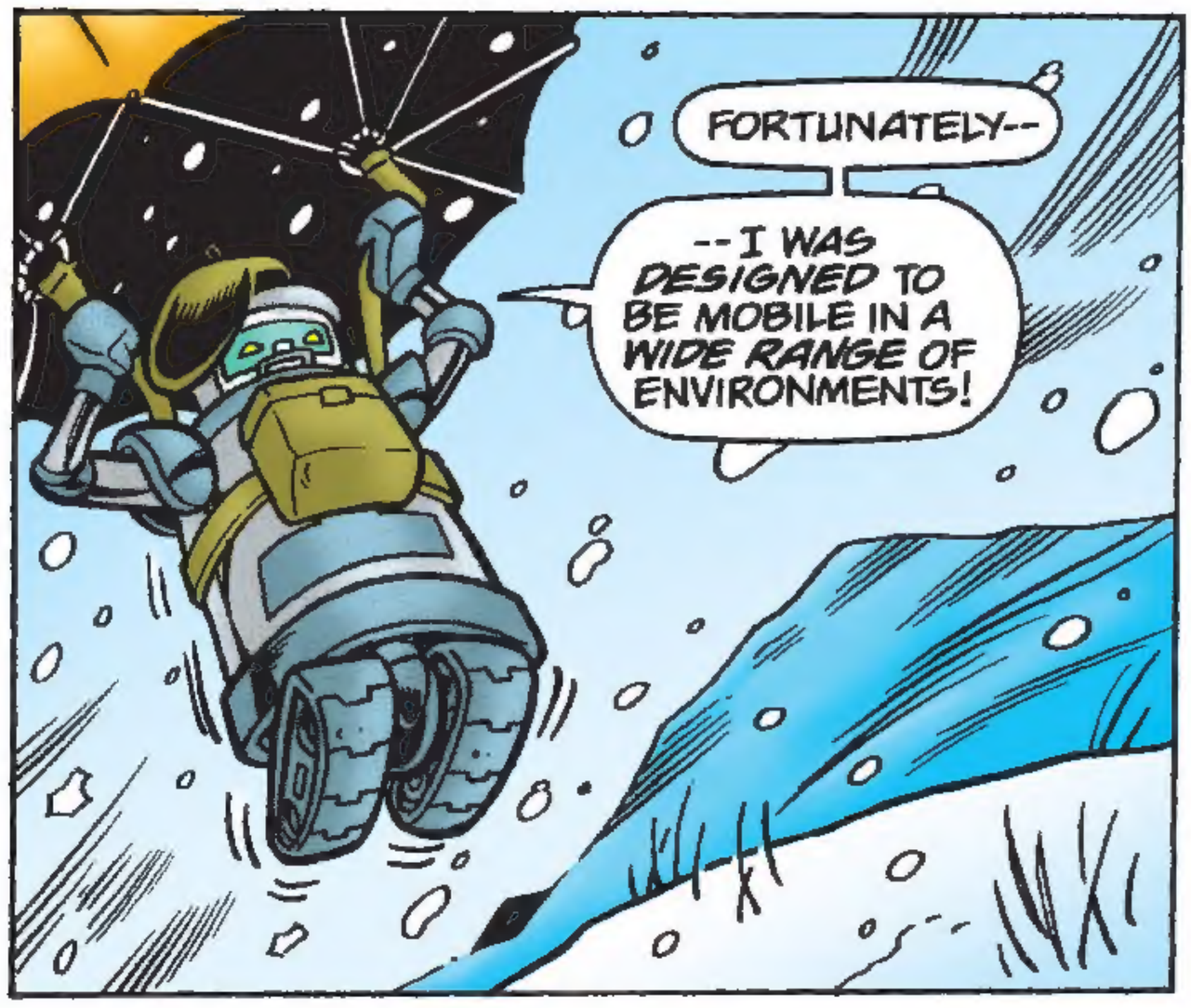
DAY ONE
I THOUGHT YOU SAID IT WAS GOING TO BE CLEAR SKIES, MATE!
ZIS IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, ST. JOHN!
I'VE FLOWN IN WORSE!
JUST SO LONG AS YOU GET US TO THE LANDING POINT!
I'D HATE TO SEE THE GAME CALLED ON ACCOUNT OF WEATHER!
IF IT IS, IT WON'T BE BECAUSE OF MOI!
GET YOUR TEAM READY TO HIT THE DROP POINT!

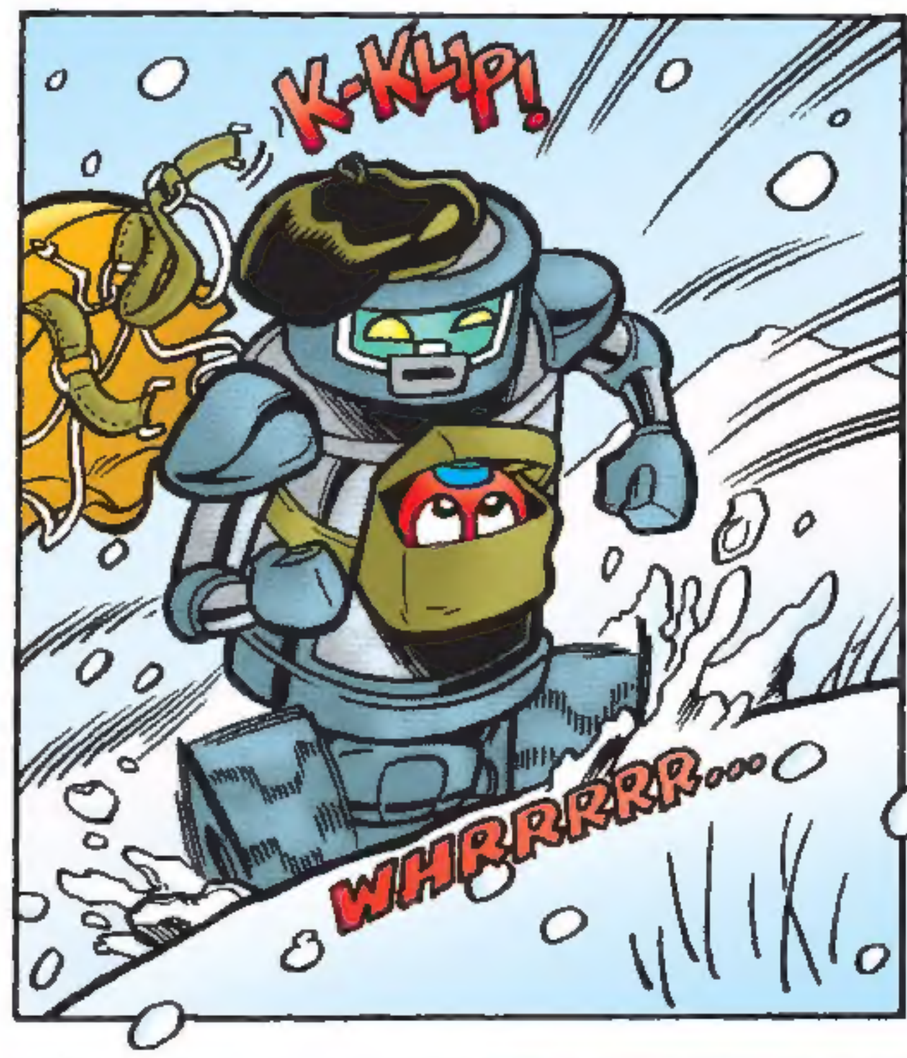
EVERYONE ALL SET?
ANY QUESTIONS?
YEAH!
COMMANDER, I--
SAVE 'EM FOR LATER!

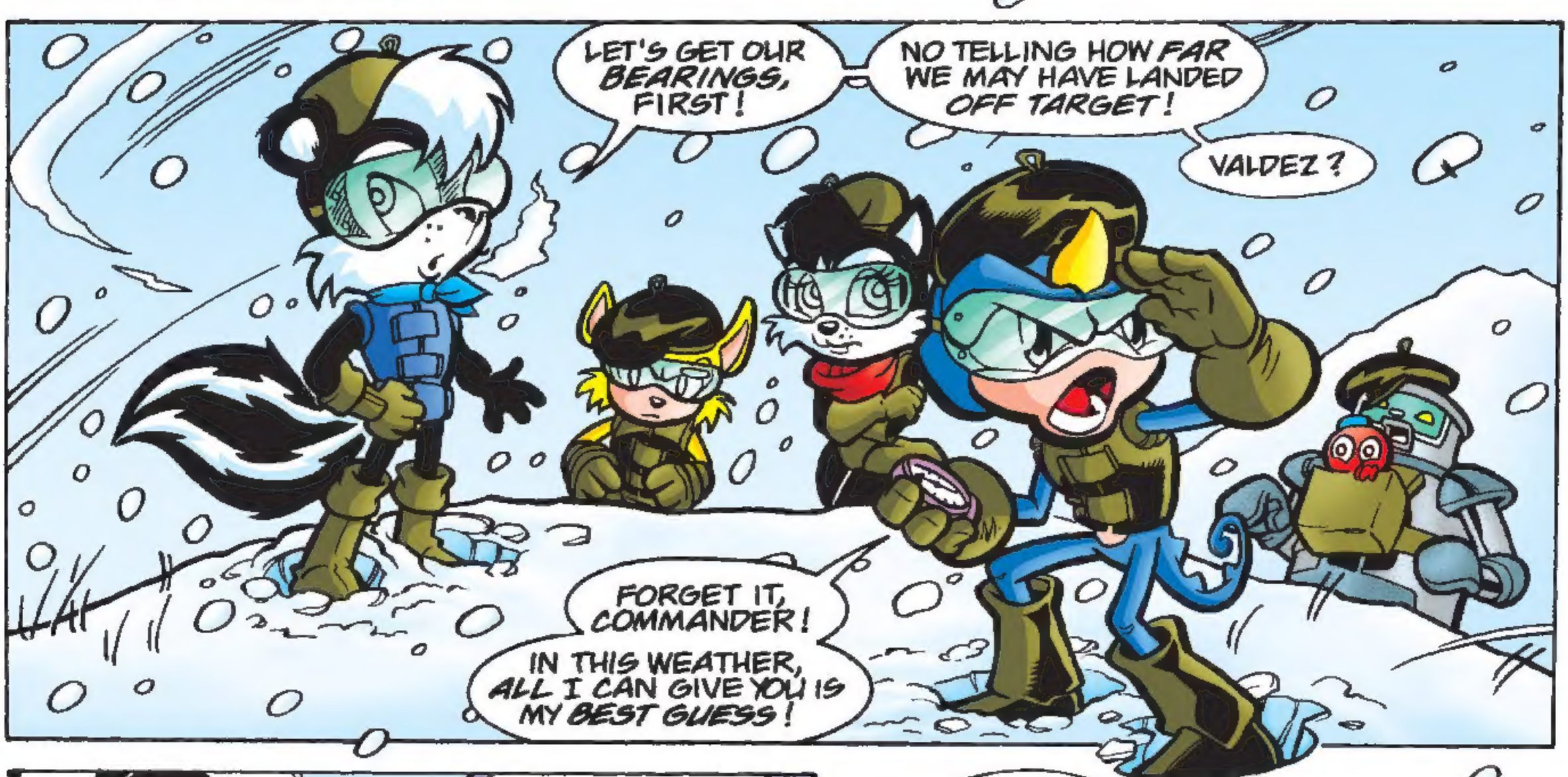





KNUCKLES IN:
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO
Queen Alicia?
THIS DOES NOT LOOK GOOD--NOT GOOD AT ALL, BOMB!
SOMETHING'S WRONG HERE!
ONLY ONE PLACE ON THE ISLAND HAS SNOW--
--AND THIS AIN'T IT!
QUIT YER BELLYACHIN', ALLA YA!
WHEN I WANNA HEAR CLUCKING HENS, I'LL LET YOU KNOW!
NOW, LET'S DITCH THE PARACHUTES AND PREPARE TO MOVE OUT!
I'M MORE AMAZED AT HOW QUICK THE RAIN TURNED TO SNOW!
SNOW! RAIN! WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?!
IT'S STILL WATER NO MATTER WHAT YOU CALL IT! YEEEEECHH!


FORTUNATELY--
--I WAS DESIGNED TO BE MOBILE IN A WIDE RANGE OF ENVIRONMENTS!

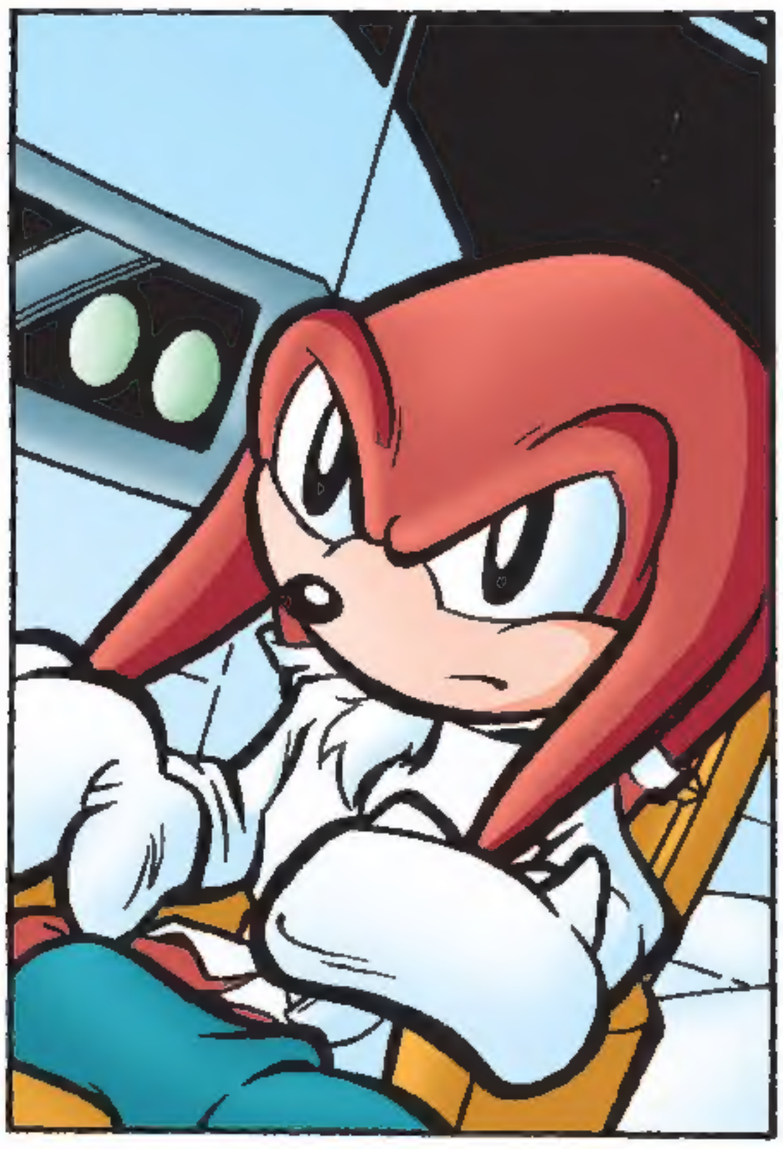

K-KLIP!
WHRRRRRR...

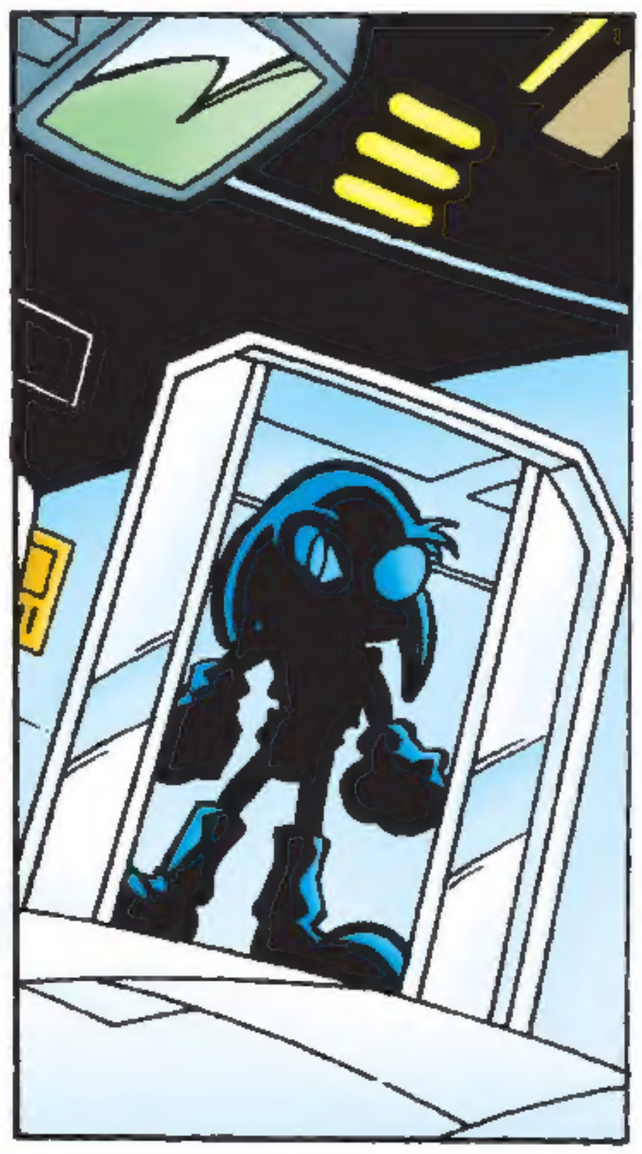

LET'S GET OUR BEARINGS, FIRST!
NO TELLING HOW FAR WE MAY HAVE LANDED OFF TARGET!
VALDEZ?
FORGET IT, COMMANDER!
IN THIS WEATHER, ALL I CAN GIVE YOU IS MY BEST GUESS!

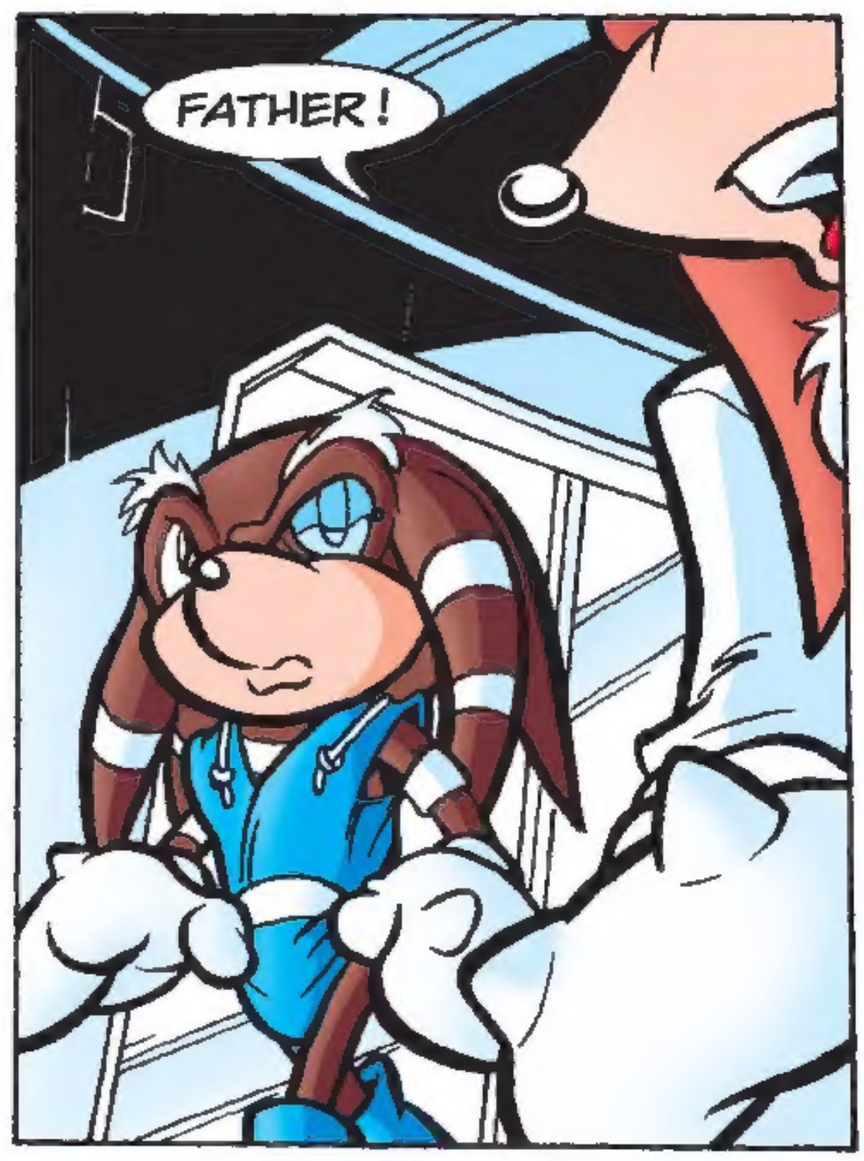
AND WHAT WOULD THAT BE?
I'M NOT SURE, BUT I'D SWEAR THOSE ARE SOME OF THE SANDOPOLIS RUINS!
IF THAT'S SO, NORTH IS TO OUR RIGHT!

YOU HEARD VALDEZ, EVERYONE!
THAT MEANS--BEST GUESS--THAT THE ROYAL COMPOUND SHOULD BE LEFT AT 10:00!
WITH ANY LUCK--

"--WE SHOULD REACH THE COMPOUND BEFORE *NIGHTFALL*!"







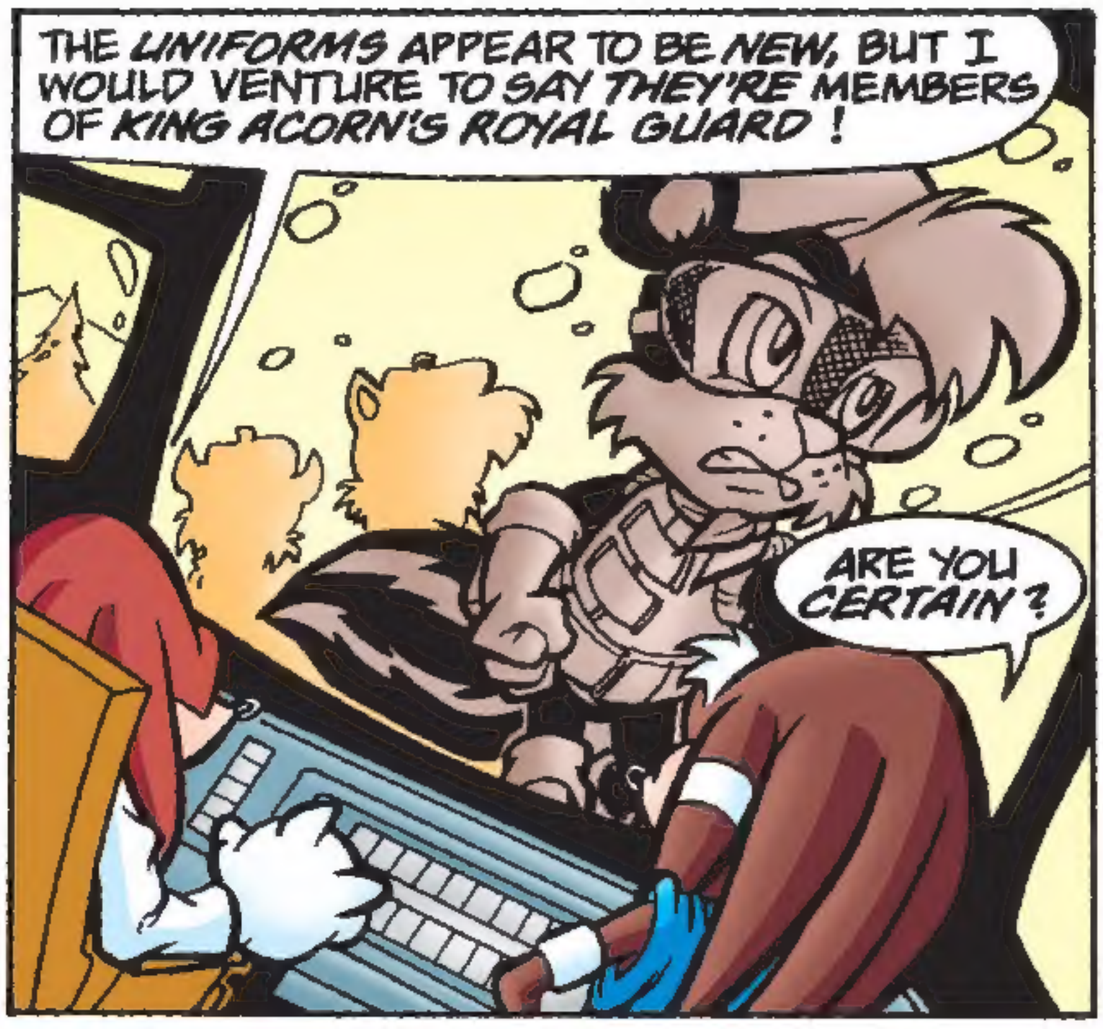
I CAME BY TO CHECK IN AND SEE HOW YOU WERE DOING!

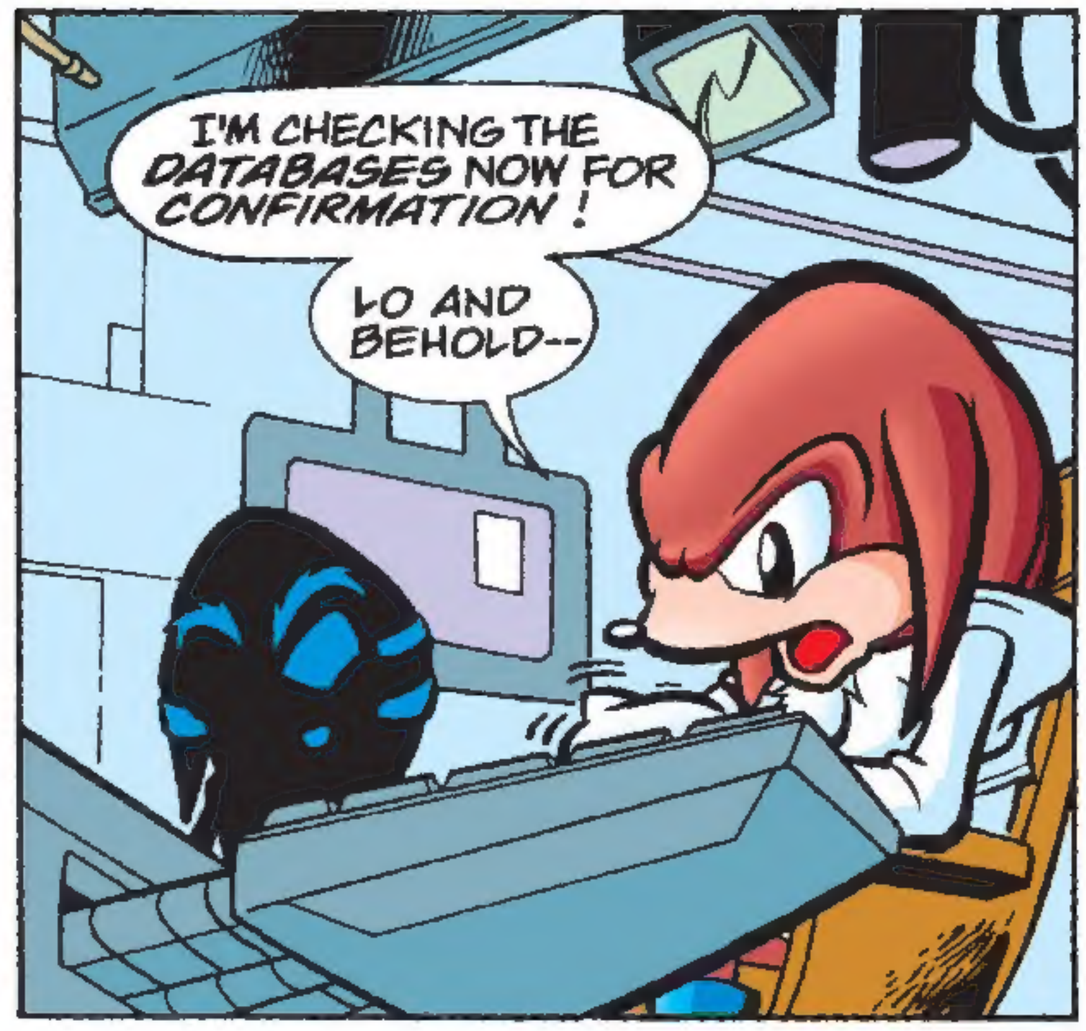
I CAN TAKE OVER FOR YOU IF YOU LIKE!

MUCH AS I *APPRECIATE* THE OFFER, FATHER, MY PLACE IS *HERE* RIGHT *NOW*!

WE'RE ABOUT TO GO FROM THE *FRYING PAN* INTO THE *FIRE* ONCE AGAIN!

OH?





--WE HAVE A MATCH!

COMMANDER IAN ST. JOHN OF HIS ROYAL MAJESTY'S ELITE GUARD!

NOT QUITE! LOOK AT THE READOUT!

THE COMMANDER IS IN EXCEPTIONAL HEALTH FOR A CORPSE--

DECEASED: KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY.

--OR ELSE THAT'S HIS SON!

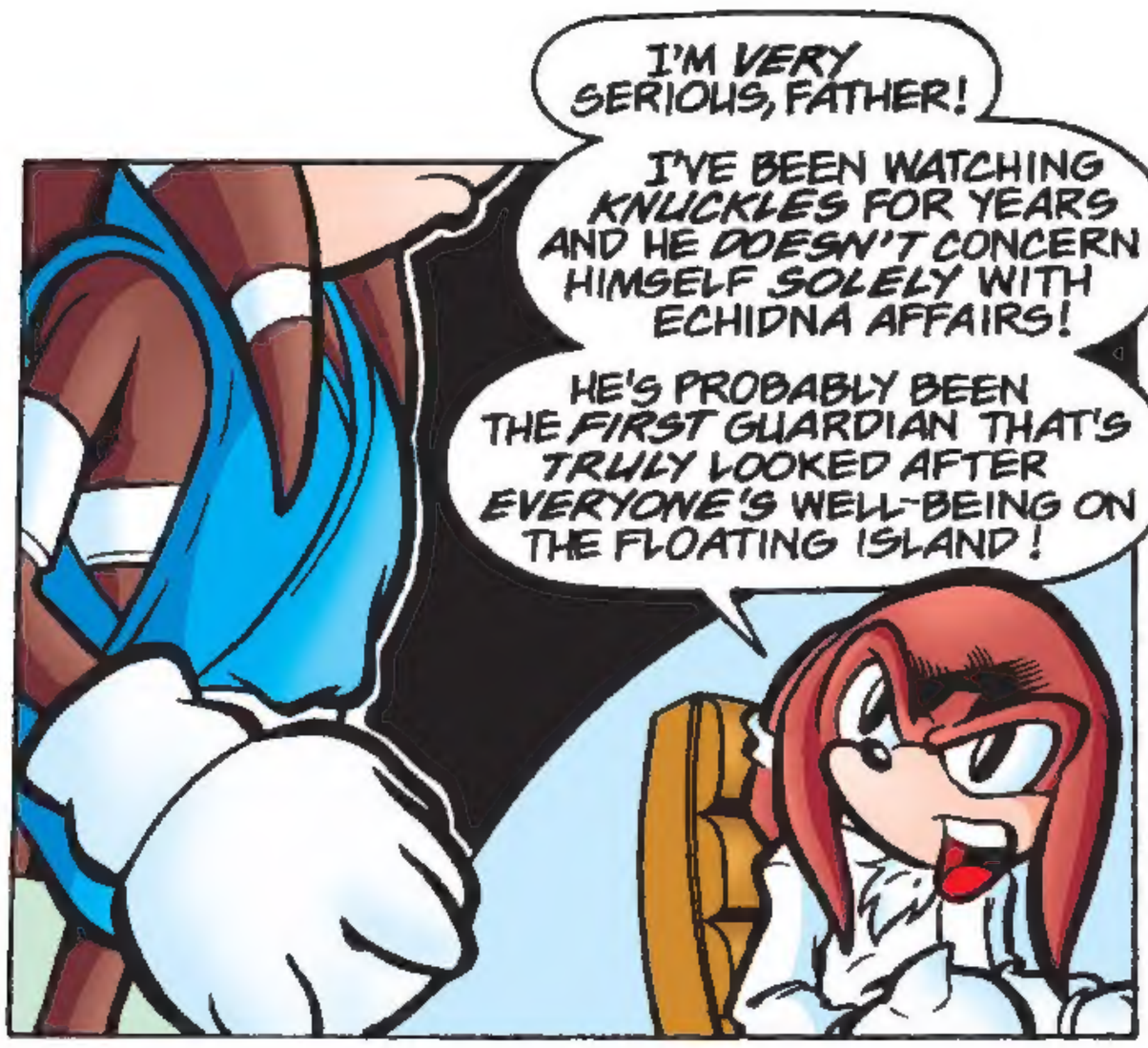
EITHER WAY, THEIR PRESENCE IS A MAJOR CAUSE FOR CONCERN!

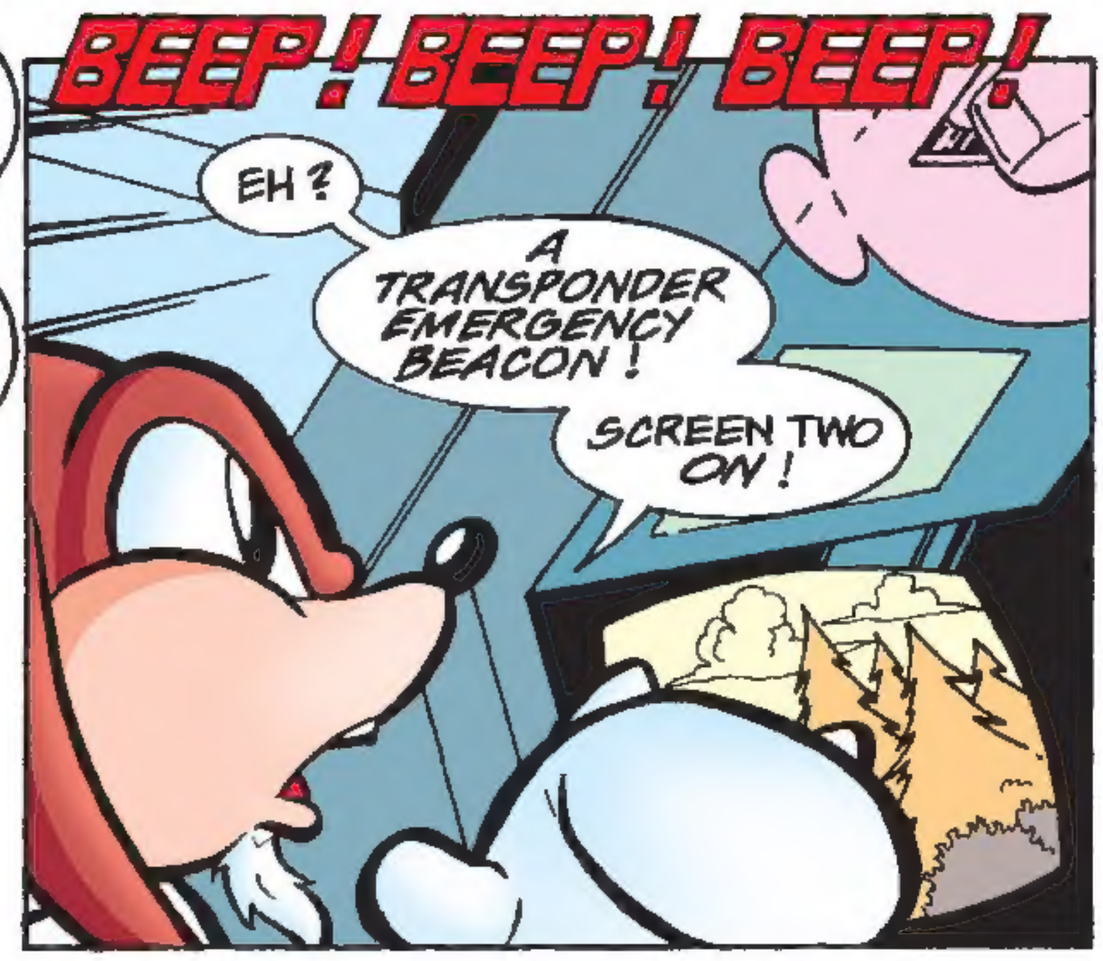
IF THE OVERLANDERS GET WIND OF THIS, THEY MAY BELIEVE WE'VE GONE BACK ON OUR WORD!

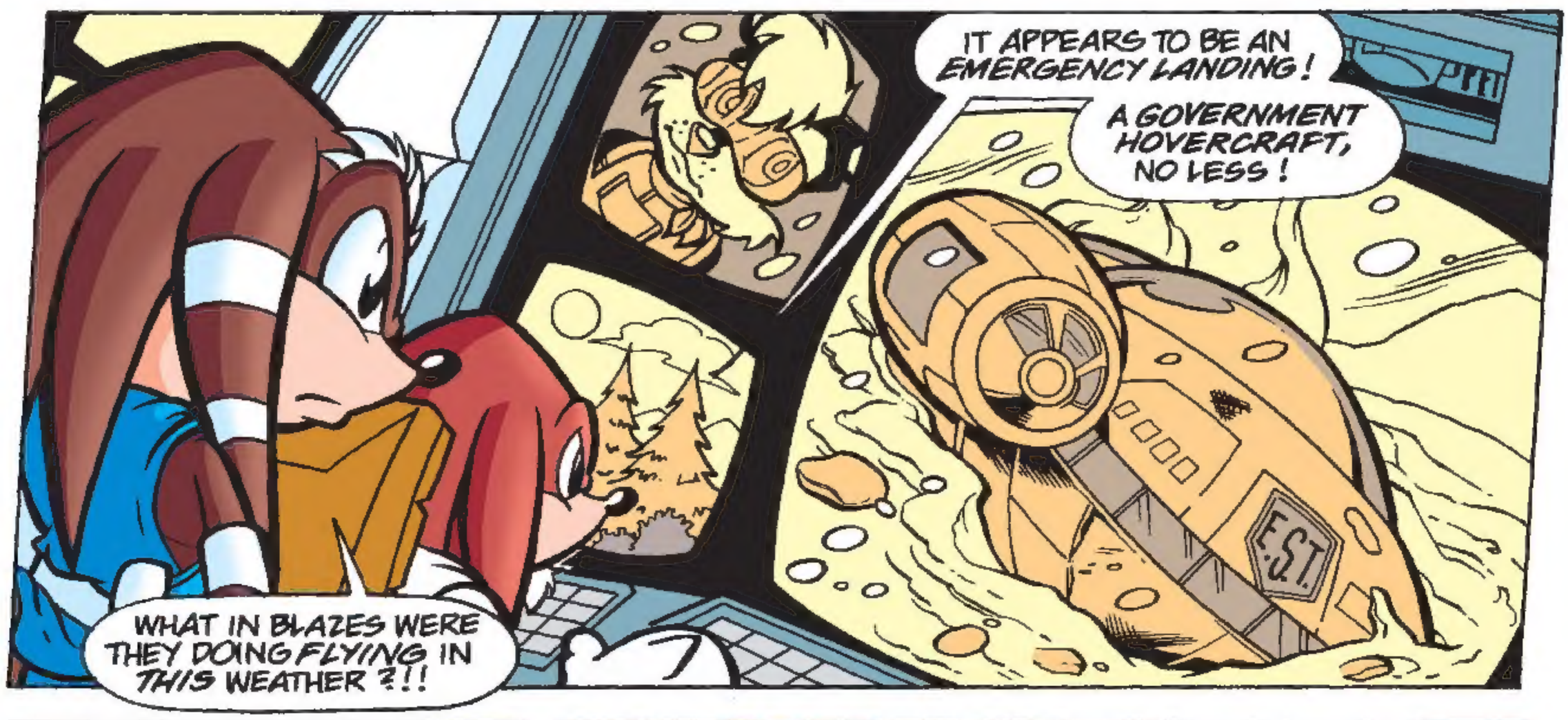
PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BETTER IF THEY DID!

OUR FIRE-ANT BRETHREN MAY HAVE HIT IT ON THE HEAD WHEN THEY SAID WE WERE TOO PAROCHIAL*.

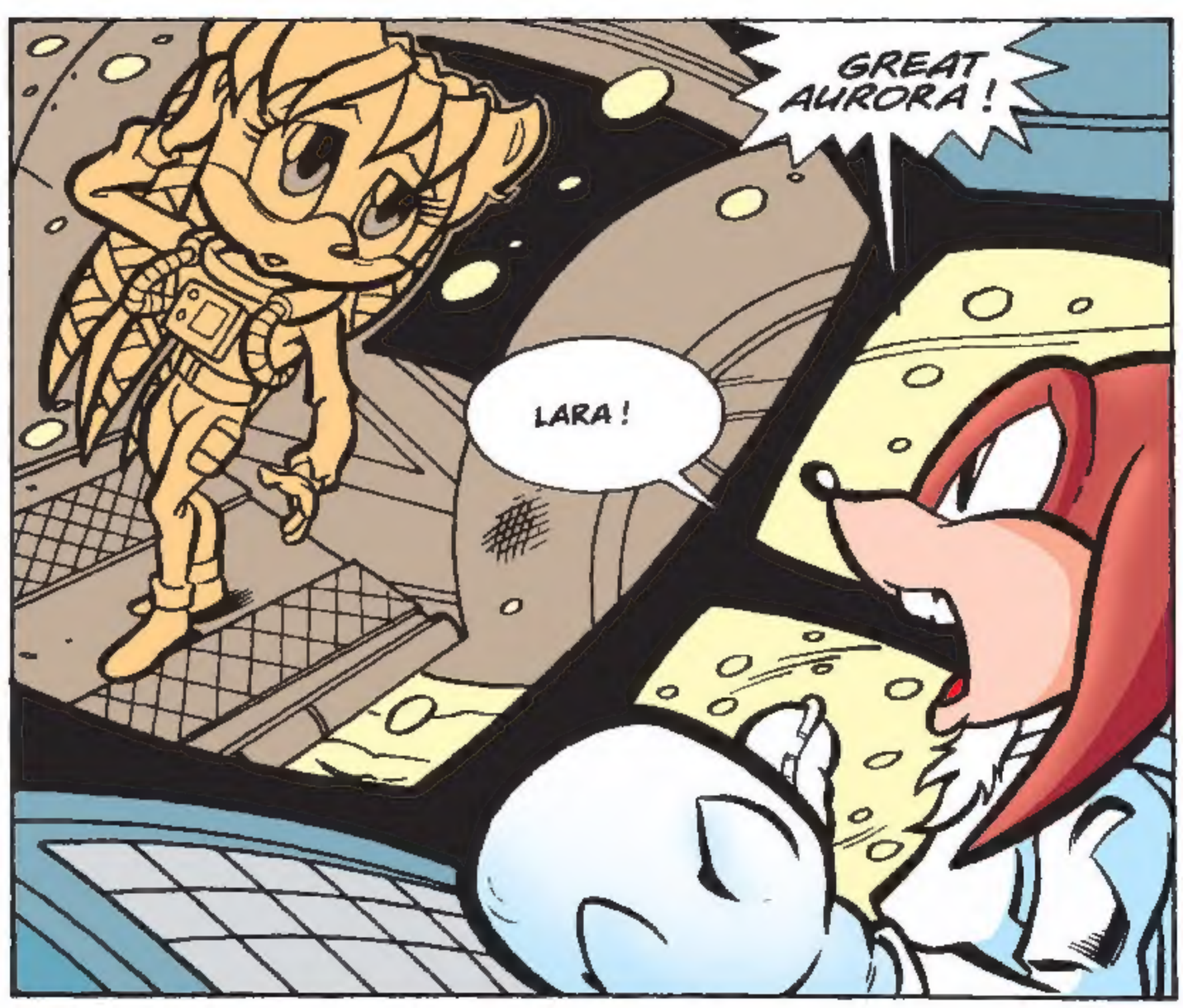
*MEANING, "RESTRICTED TO A NARROW SCOPE" --DICTIONARIES 'R US.


I'M VERY SERIOUS, FATHER!
I'VE BEEN WATCHING KNUCKLES FOR YEARS AND HE DOESN'T CONCERN HIMSELF SOLELY WITH ECHIDNA AFFAIRS!
HE'S PROBABLY BEEN THE FIRST GUARDIAN THAT'S TRULY LOOKED AFTER EVERYONE'S WELL-BEING ON THE FLOATING ISLAND!

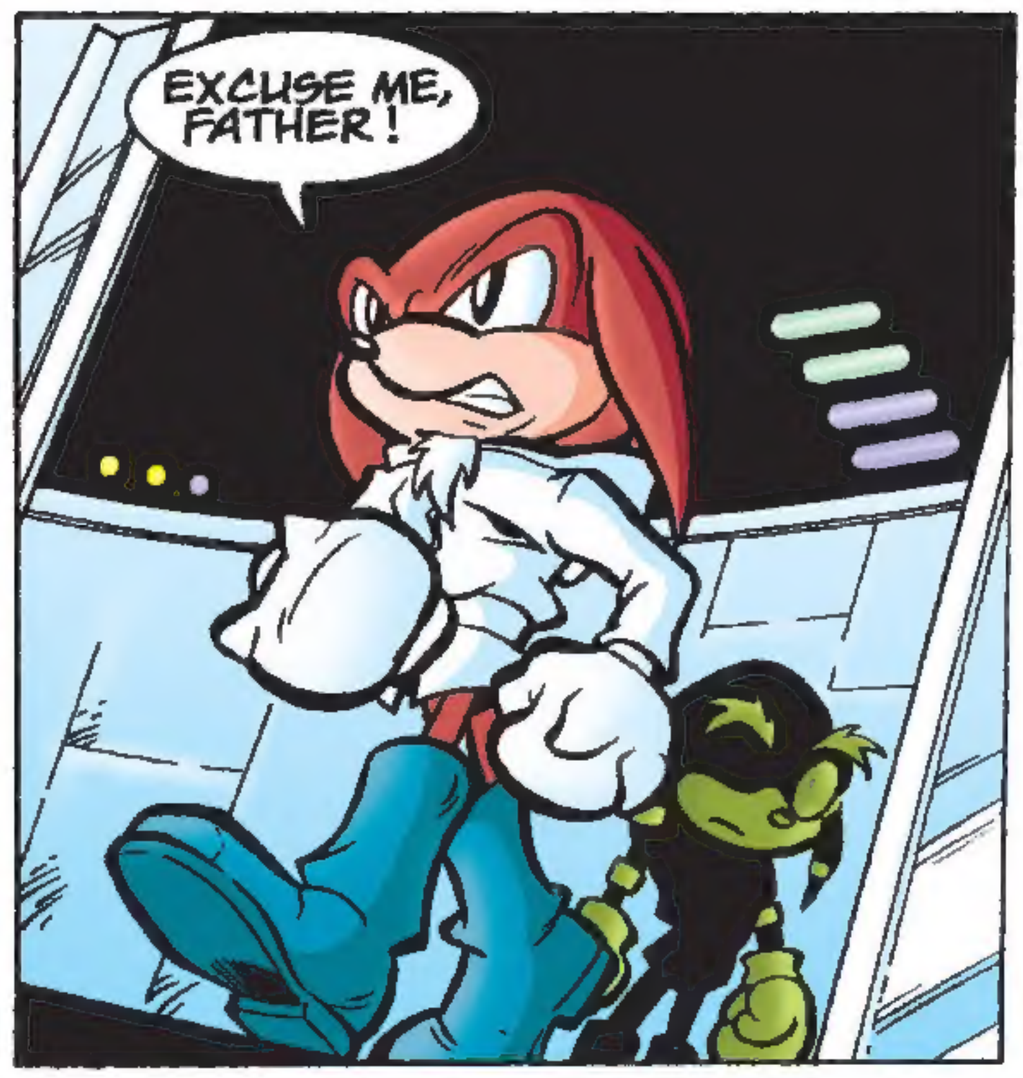

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!
EH?
A TRANSPONDER EMERGENCY BEACON!
SCREEN TWO ON!

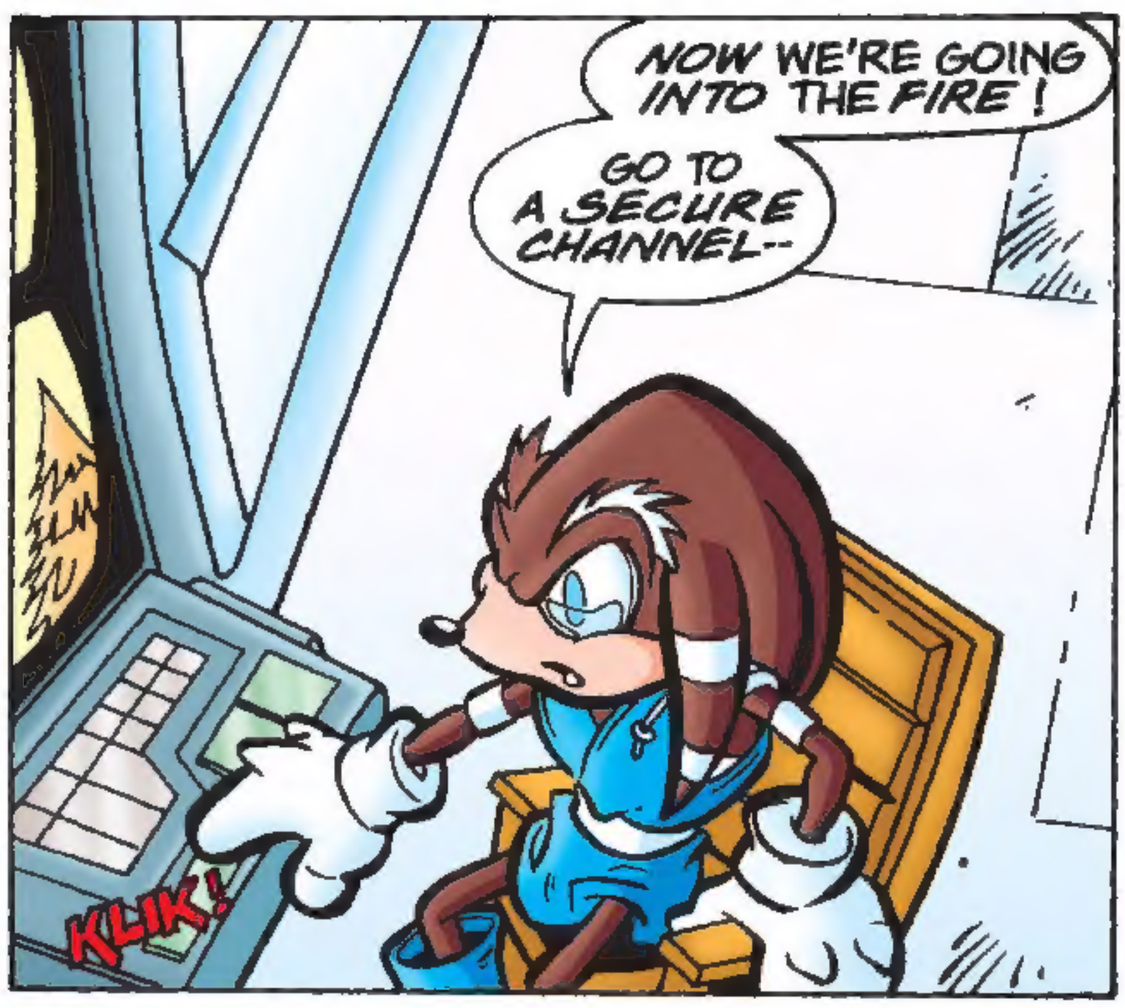

IT APPEARS TO BE AN EMERGENCY LANDING!
A GOVERNMENT HOVERCRAFT, NO LESS!
WHAT IN BLAZES WERE THEY DOING FLYING IN THIS WEATHER?!!

I'M SURE CONSTABLE REMINGTON WILL HAVE A FEW CHOICE WORDS TO SAY ONCE HIS MEN REACH THE CRAFT!
WHA—?!!

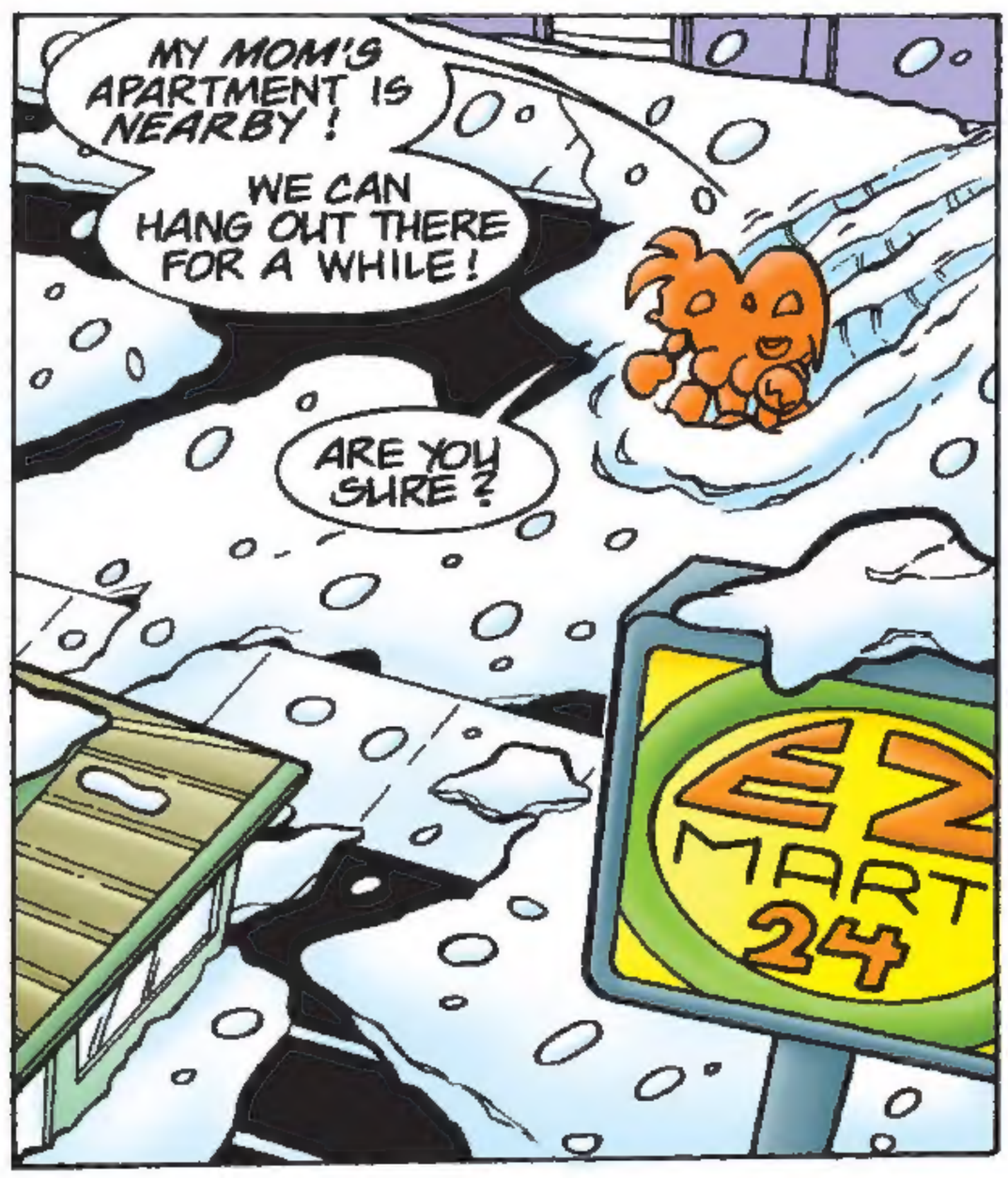

GREAT AURORA!
LARA!

ON SECOND THOUGHT, I MAY HAVE A FEW CHOICE WORDS FOR HER MYSELF!


EXCUSE ME, FATHER!

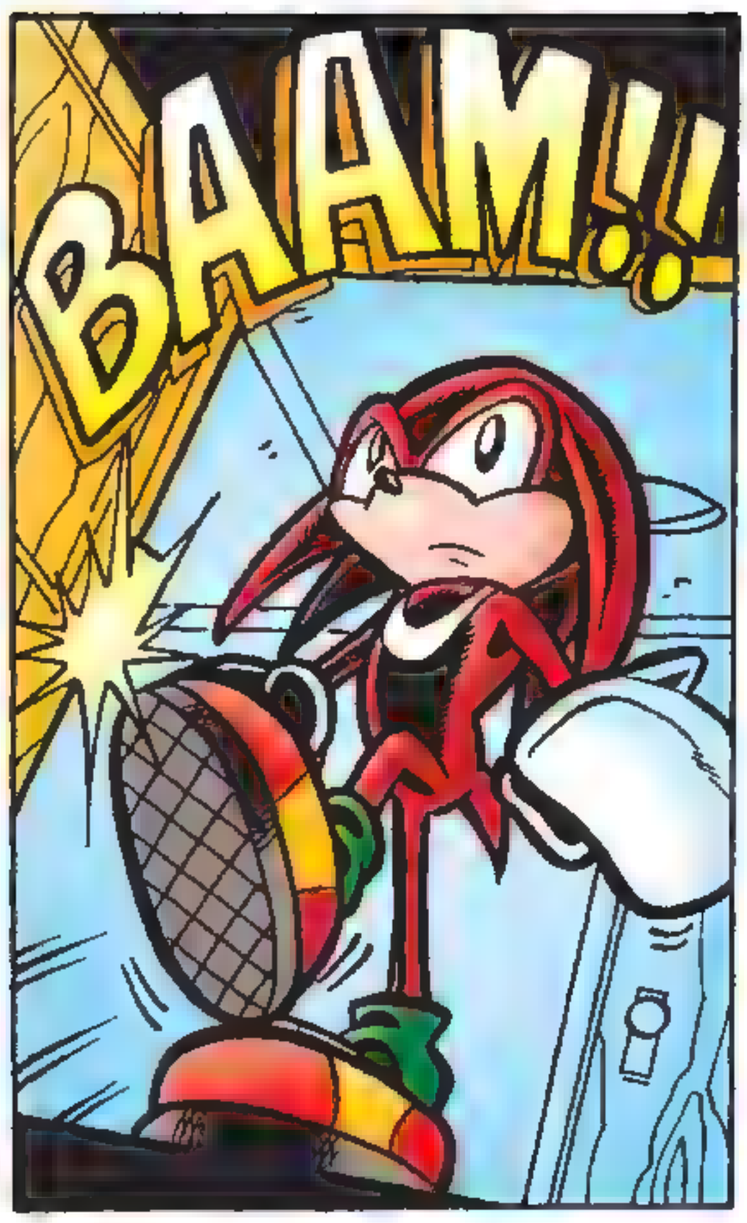

NOW WE'RE GOING INTO THE FIRE!
GO TO A SECURE CHANNEL--
KLIK!

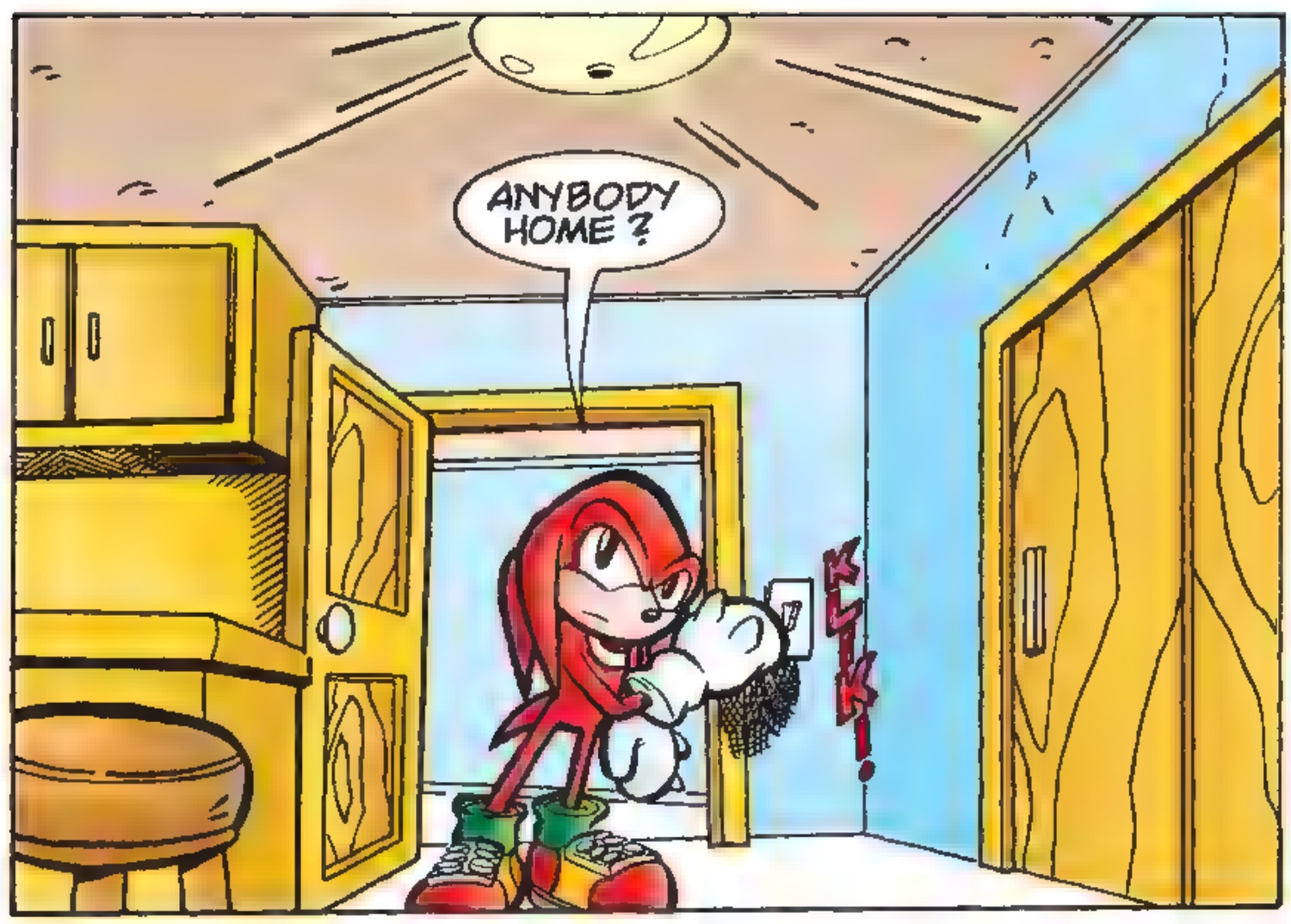
"--AND THEN GET ME A DIRECT LINE TO THE CONSTABLE!"
BRRR! I-I'M NOT USED TO THIS COLD!

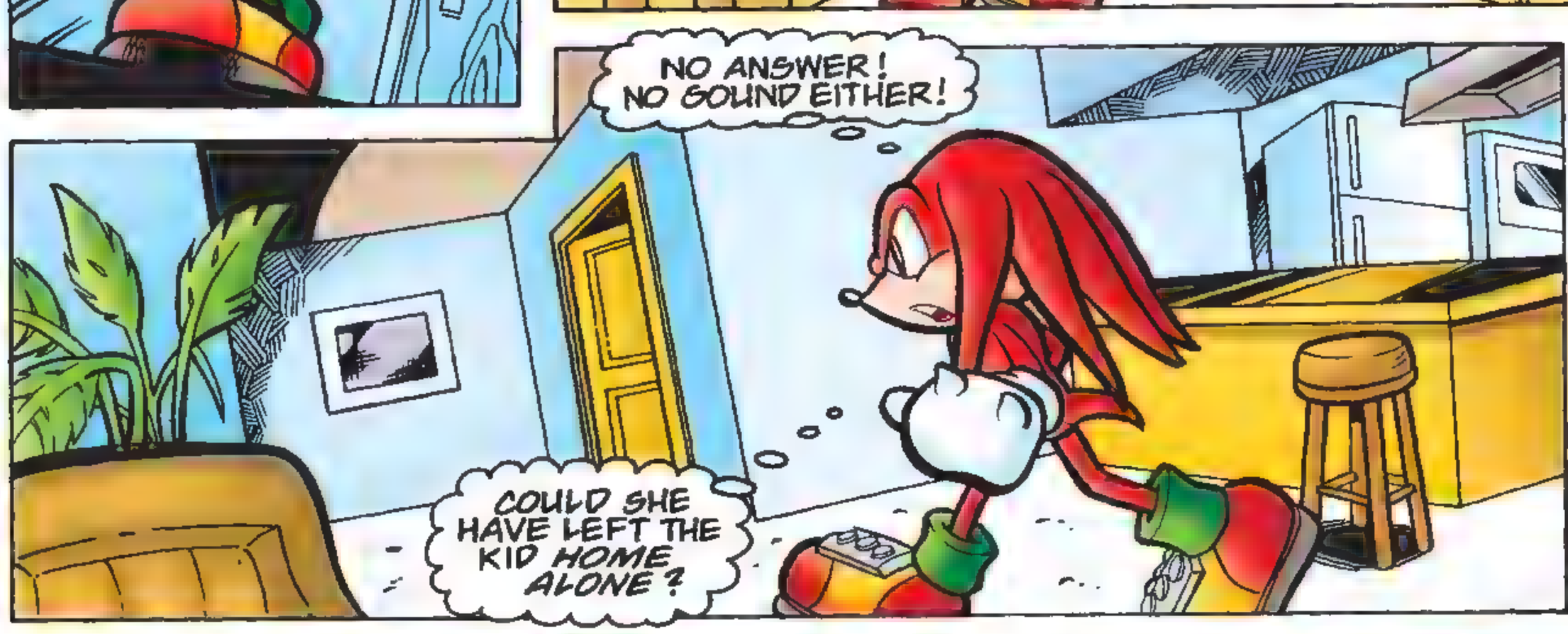

MY MOM'S APARTMENT IS NEARBY!
WE CAN HANG OUT THERE FOR A WHILE!
ARE YOU SURE?
EZ MART 24

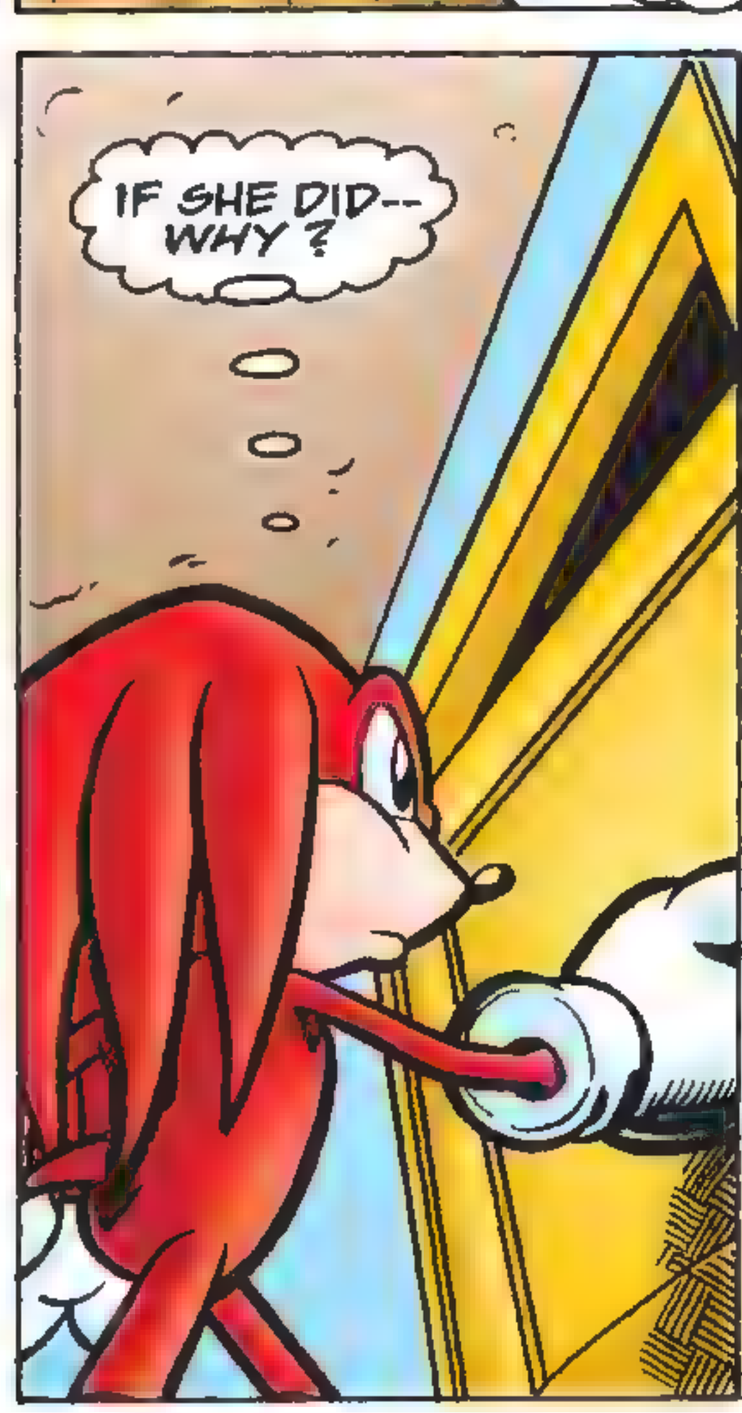
NOT REALLY--BUT I'M TOO COLD TO THINK OF ANYTHING BETTER!
HOLD IT!

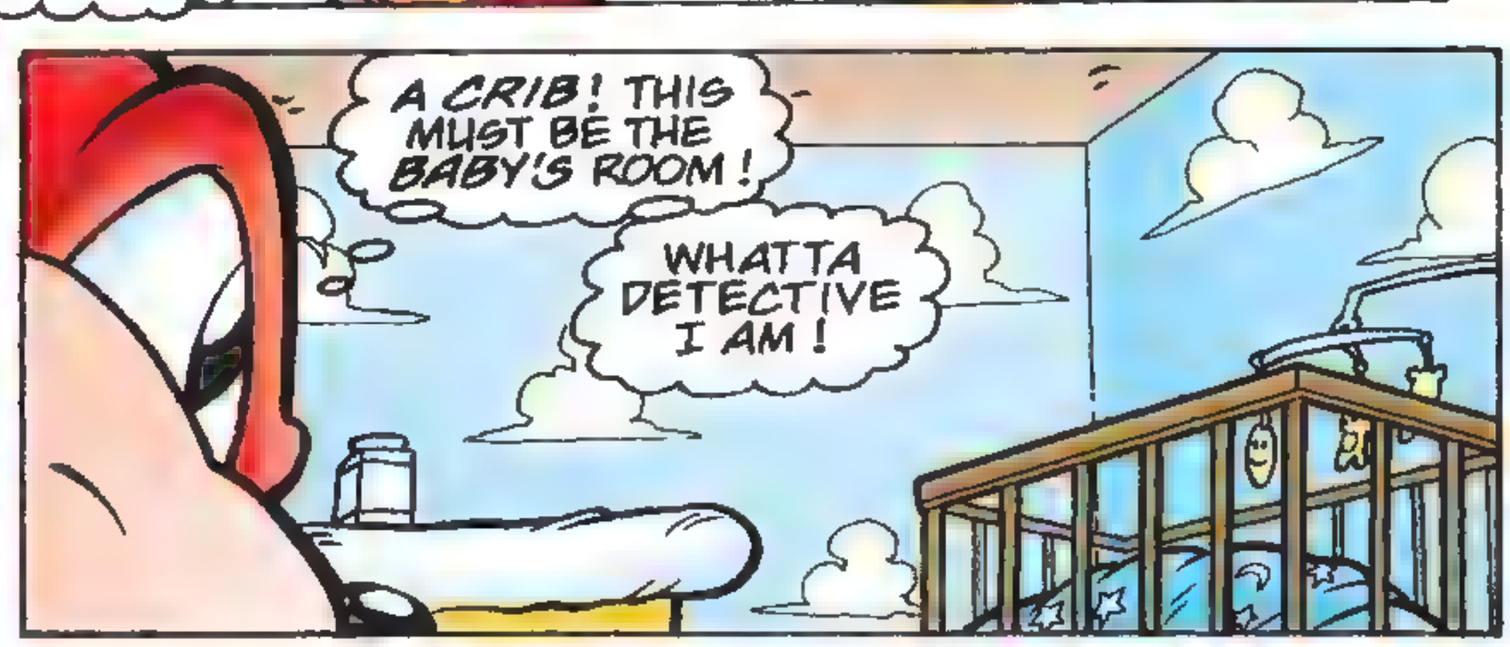
M-M-MY B-B-B-BABY...
CALL FOR AN AMBULANCE, JULIE-SU!
GOTCHA!
WHAT BABY?
M-M-MY B-B-BAY-BEE...
THERE'S NO BABY HERE!
PLEASE, MA'AM--
WHERE'S THE BABY?
B-B-BA-BABY H-H-HOME!
WHERE'S HOME?

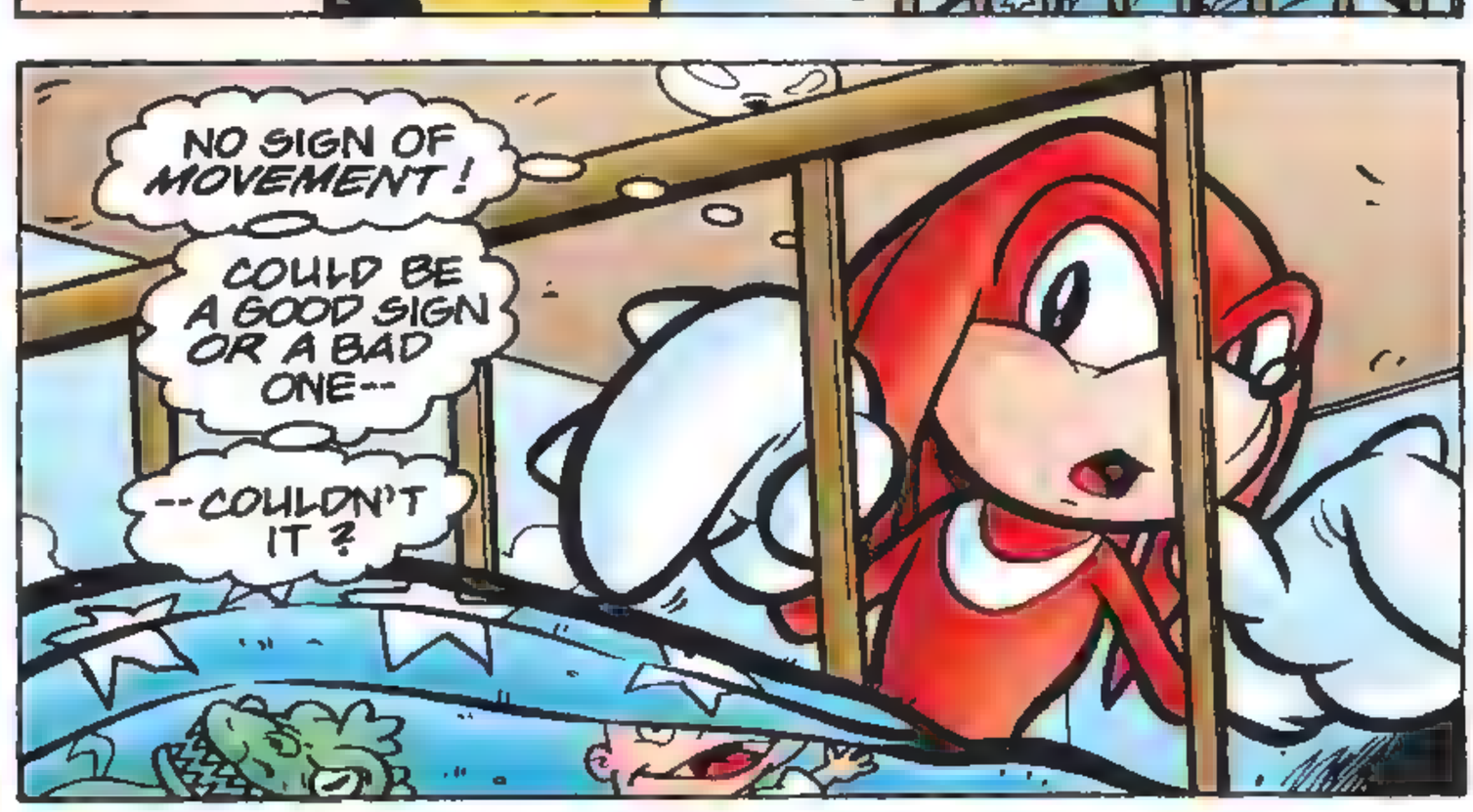

BAAM!!

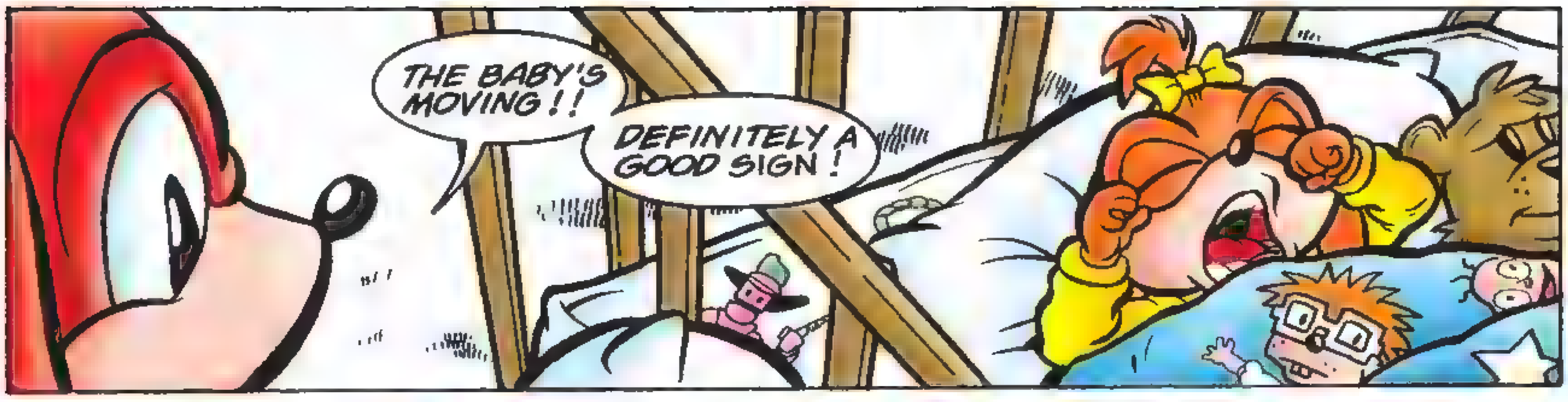

ANYBODY HOME ?
KLIK!

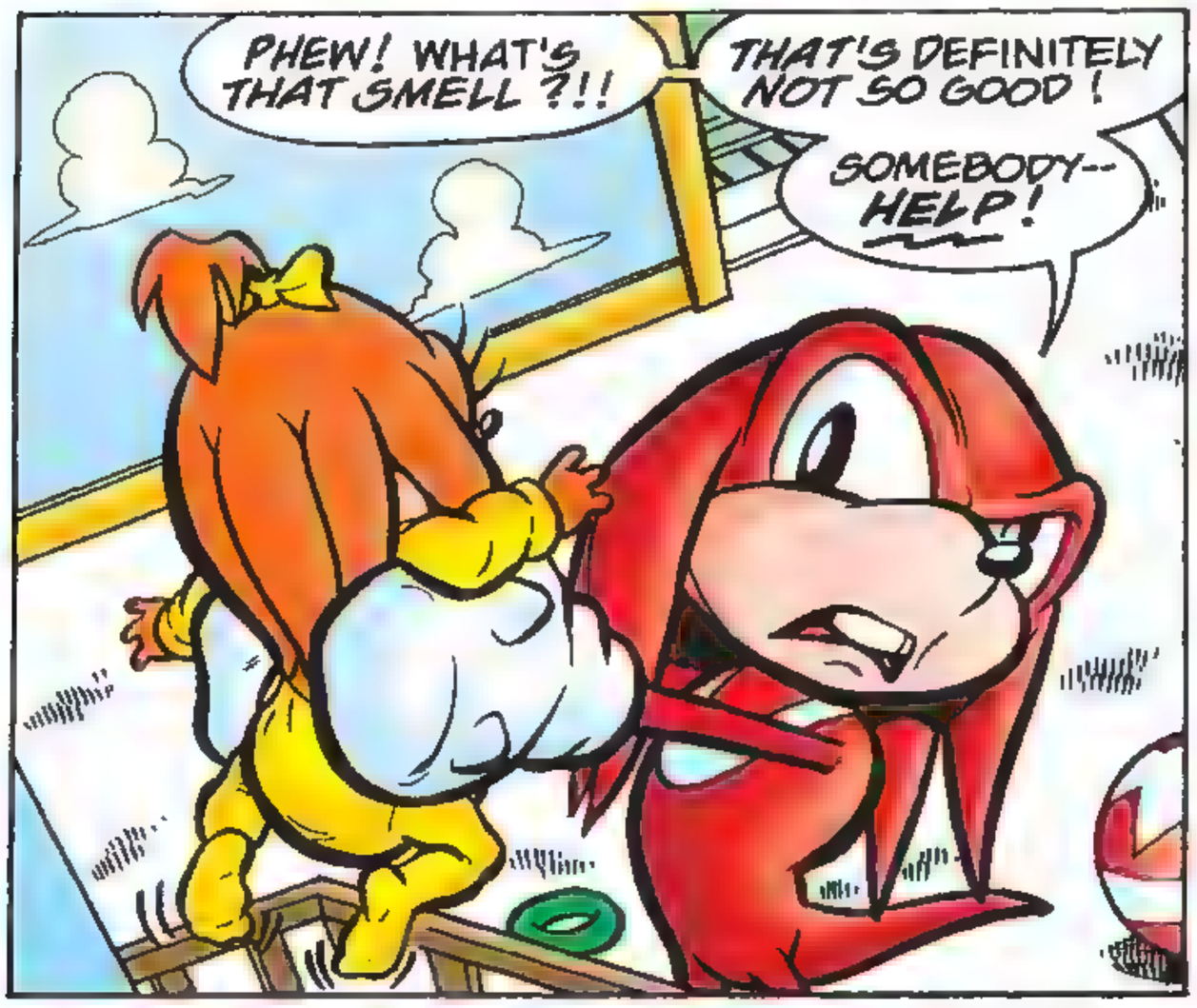

NO ANSWER ! NO SOUND EITHER!
COULD SHE HAVE LEFT THE KID HOME ALONE ?


IF SHE DID-- WHY ?


A CRIB ! THIS MUST BE THE BABY'S ROOM !
WHATTA DETECTIVE I AM !


NO SIGN OF MOVEMENT !
COULD BE A GOOD SIGN OR A BAD ONE--
--COULDN'T IT ?

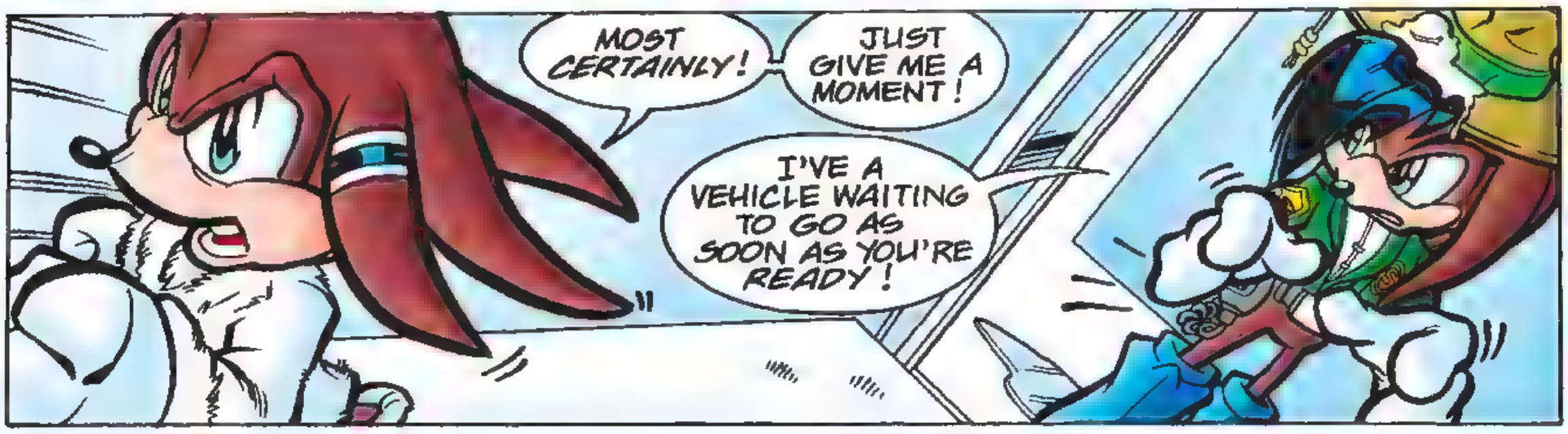

THE BABY'S MOVING!!
DEFINITELY A GOOD SIGN!


PHEW! WHAT'S THAT SMELL?!!
THAT'S DEFINITELY NOT SO GOOD!
SOMEBODY--HELP!

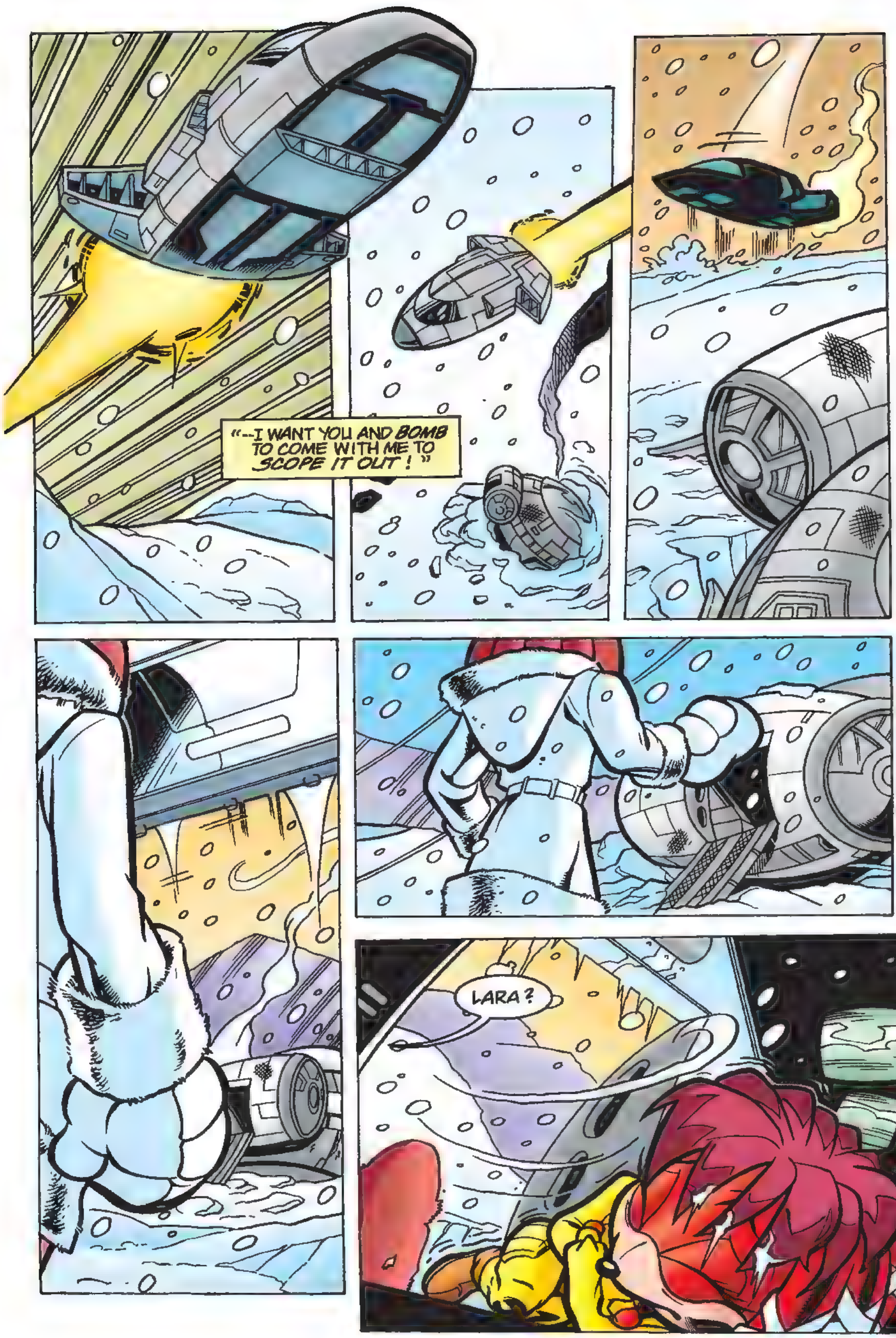
DING DONG!
"WONDER WHO THAT COULD BE?"
JUST A MOMENT!

CONSTABLE REMINGTON!!
WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE IN THIS DREADFUL WEATHER?
CITIZEN WYNMACHER! WE HAVE AN EMERGENCY--
--CONCERNING THE LADY LARA-LE!

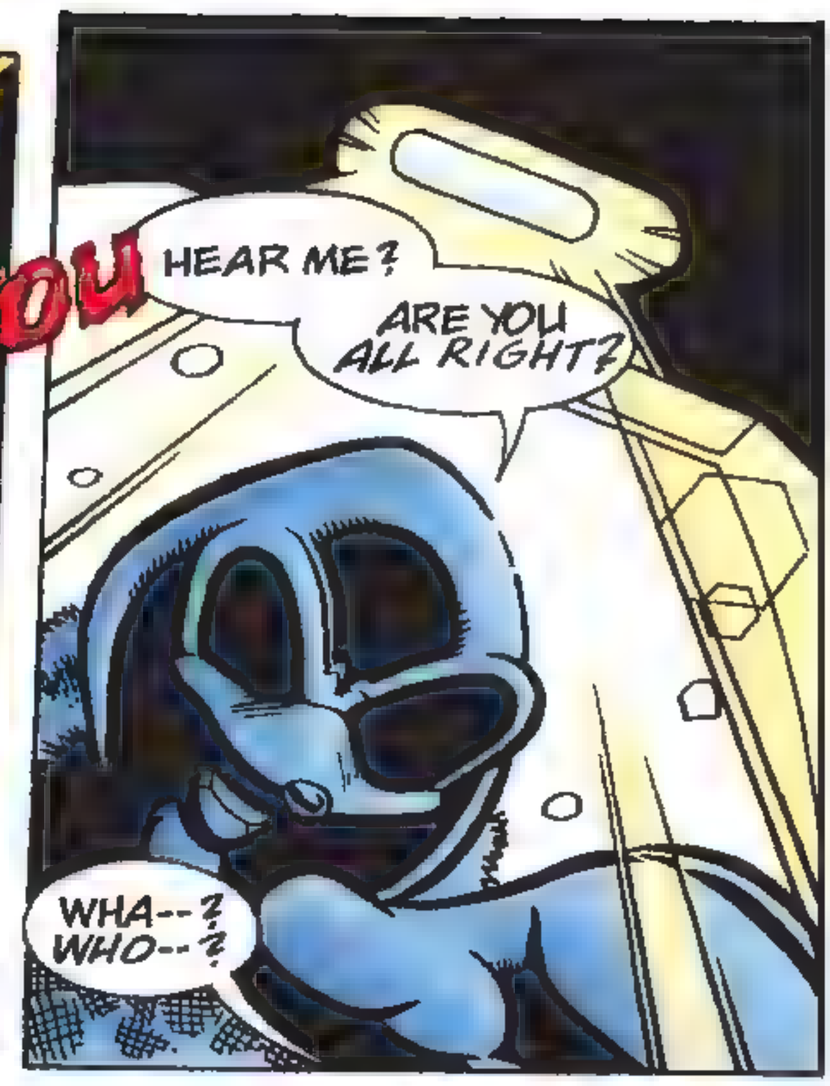
SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH LARA?
THE HOVERCRAFT SHE WAS PILOTING WAS DOWNED BY THE STORM!
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WISH TO ACCOMPANY THE RESCUE MISSION!

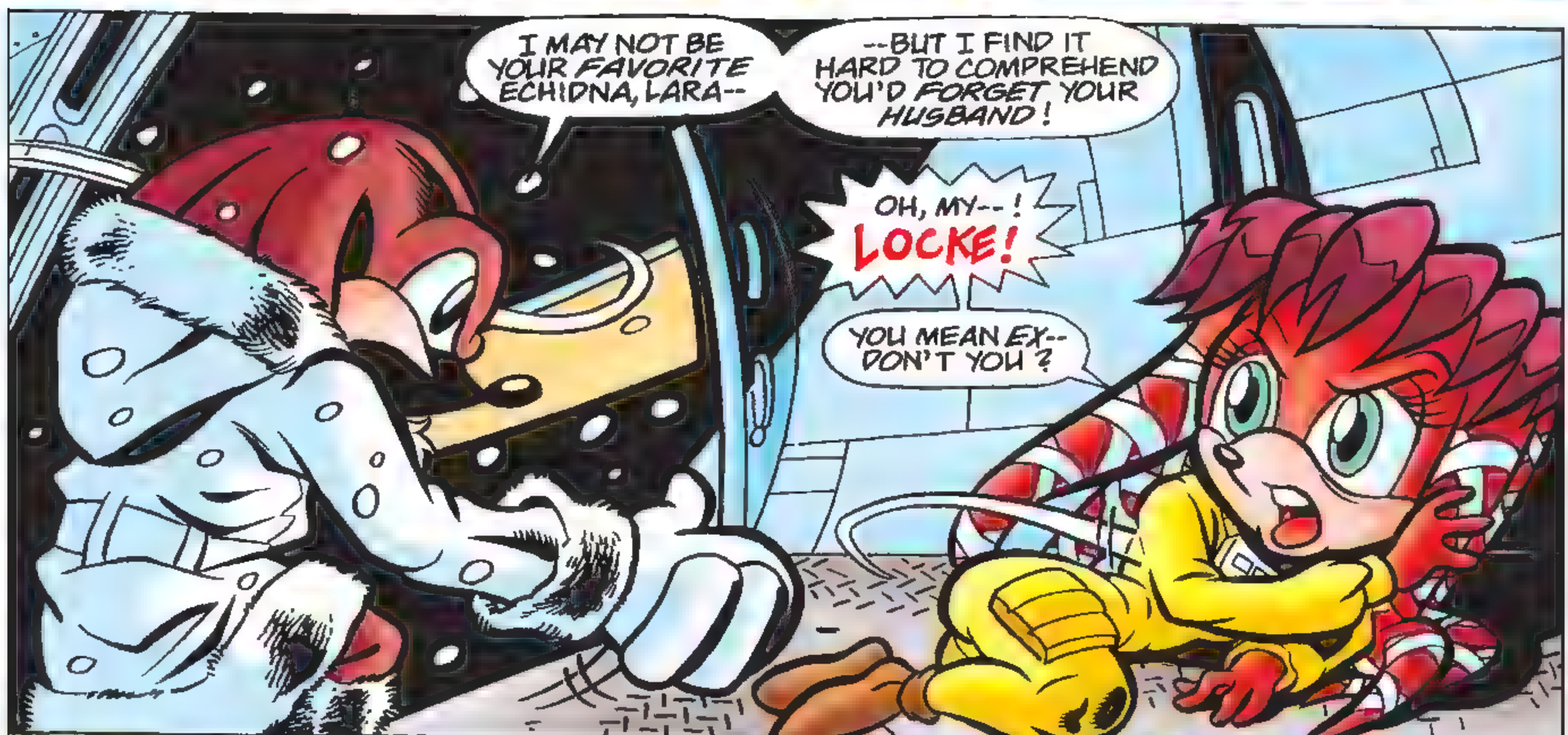

MOST CERTAINLY!
JUST GIVE ME A MOMENT!
I'VE A VEHICLE WAITING TO GO AS SOON AS YOU'RE READY!

" REMINGTON! WHAT'S THE *LATEST*?"
T-T-THIS SNOWFALL IS R-R-REALLY B-BE-BEGINNING TO GRATE ON MY NERVES!
I-I-IT'S THE C-C-COLD THAT'S G-G-GETTING TO M-M-ME!
H-H-HOW MUCH F-F-FURTHER, C-COMMANDER?
HANG IN THERE, TROOPS!
JUST REMEMBER--
--W-W-WHEN THE *GOING* G-GETS *TOUGH*--
--THE *TOUGH* KEEP *TRUDGING* ON THROUGH THE SNOW!
DOESN'T THIS *FUNKY WEATHER* KINDA MAKE YOU THINK *SOMETHING BIGGER'S* GOING ON?
ROTOR TOLD ME RECENTLY HE THOUGHT ALL OF *ROBOTNIK'S POLLUTION* WOULD BE A *PROBLEM* IN THE *LONG RUN*!
WHY GET *WORKED UP* OVER THE *WEATHER*?
OUR *ONLY* CONCERN SHOULD BE THE *MISSION*!
SPEAKING OF WHICH--
THERE'S SOMETHING UP AHEAD!
HEAVY--


"--I WANT YOU AND BOMB TO COME WITH ME TO SCOPE IT OUT!"
LARA?

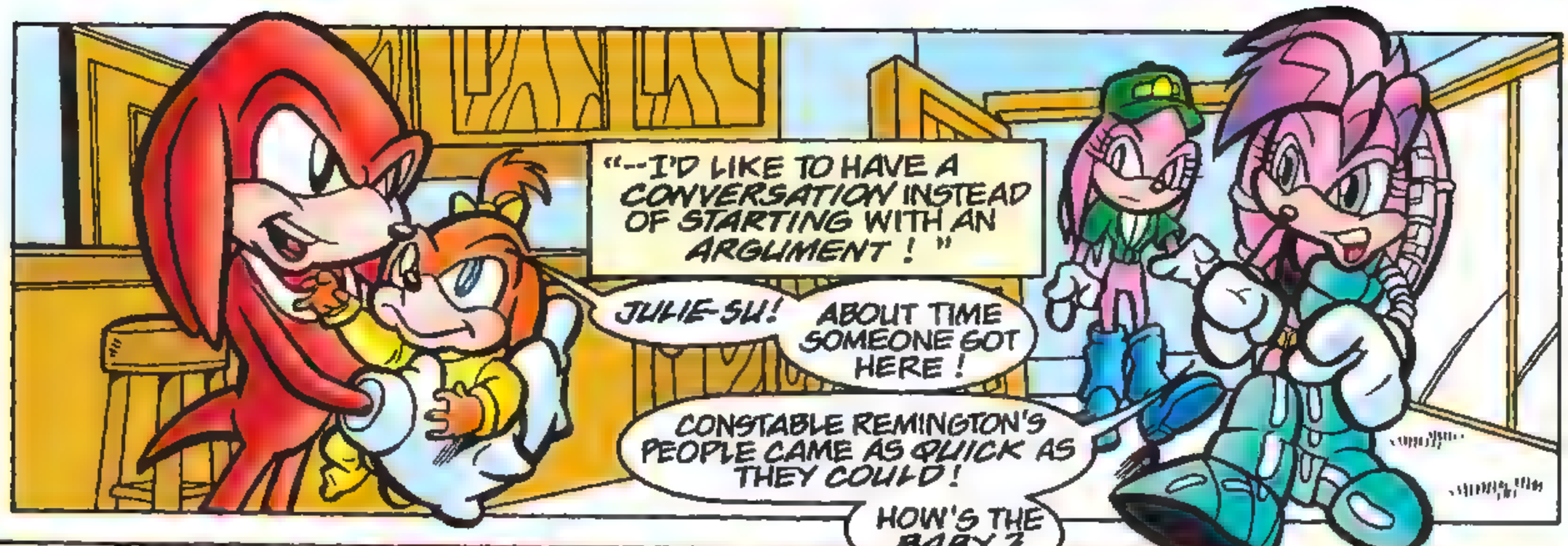
LARA! CAN YOU

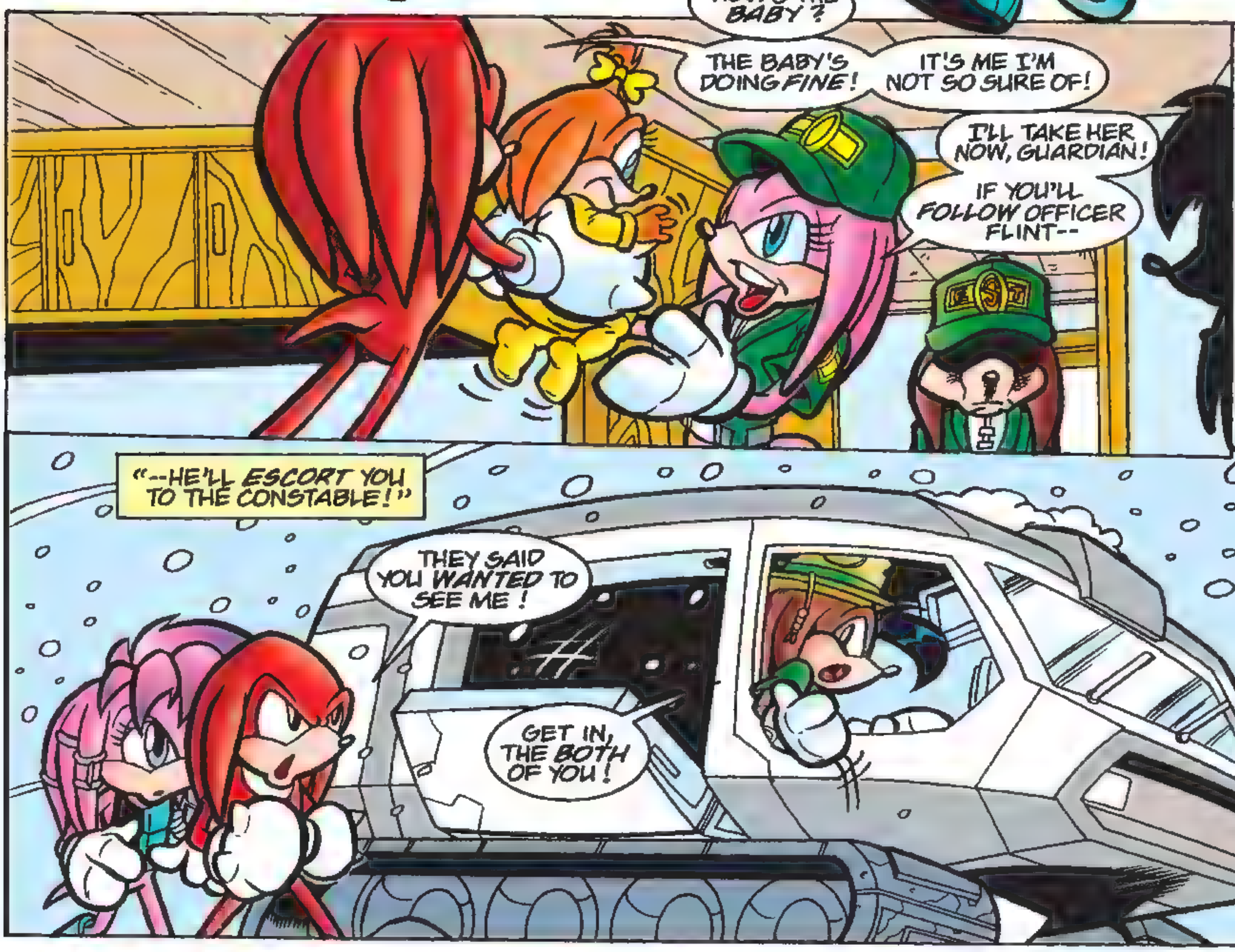

HEAR ME?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
WHA--? WHO--?

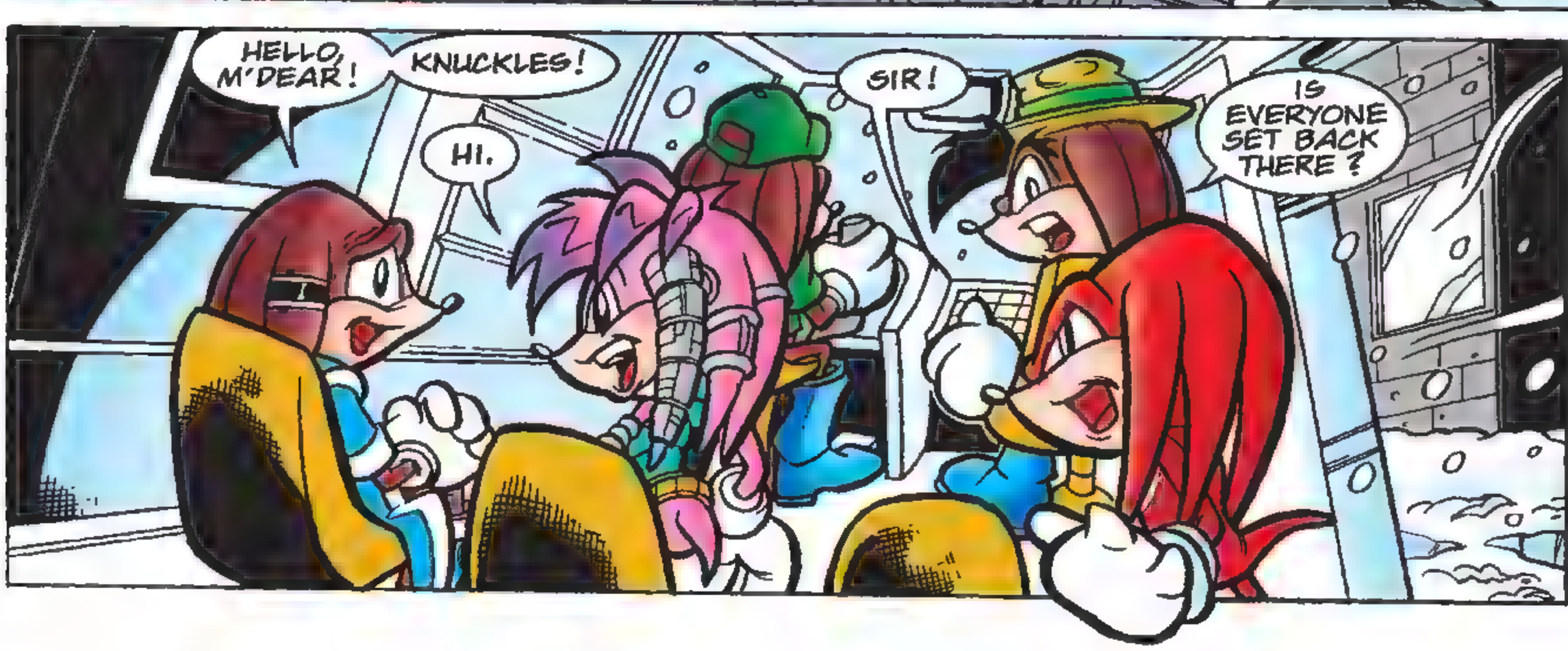

I MAY NOT BE YOUR FAVORITE ECHIDNA, LARA--
--BUT I FIND IT HARD TO COMPREHEND YOU'D FORGET YOUR HUSBAND!
OH, MY--! LOCKE!
YOU MEAN EX-- DON'T YOU?

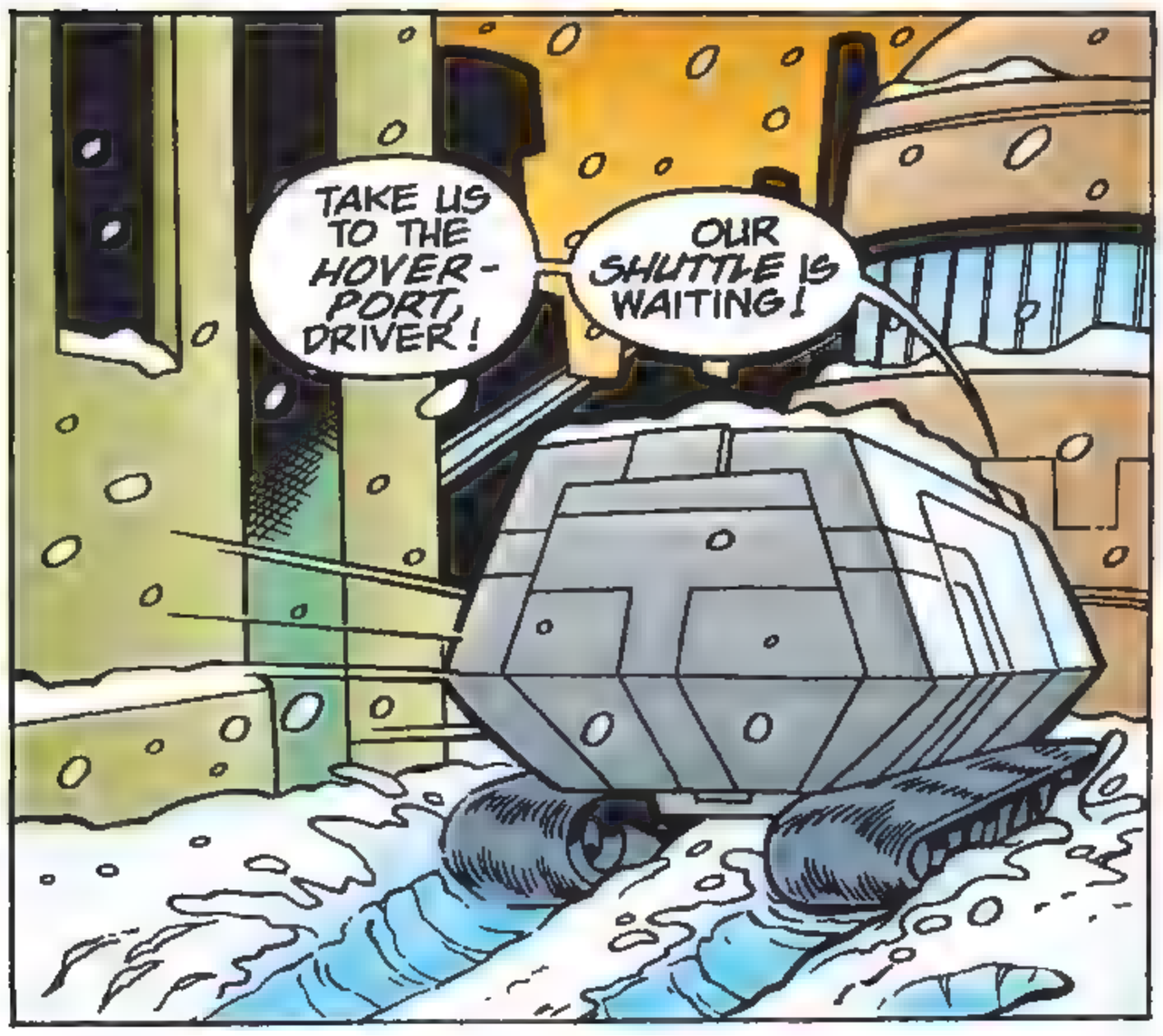
HERE I AM ALL CONCERNED ABOUT YOU, AND YOU'RE IMMEDIATELY ON THE DEFENSIVE!
CAN YOU BLAME ME?

I WOULDN'T BE IN THIS MESS IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU!
JUST ONCE--

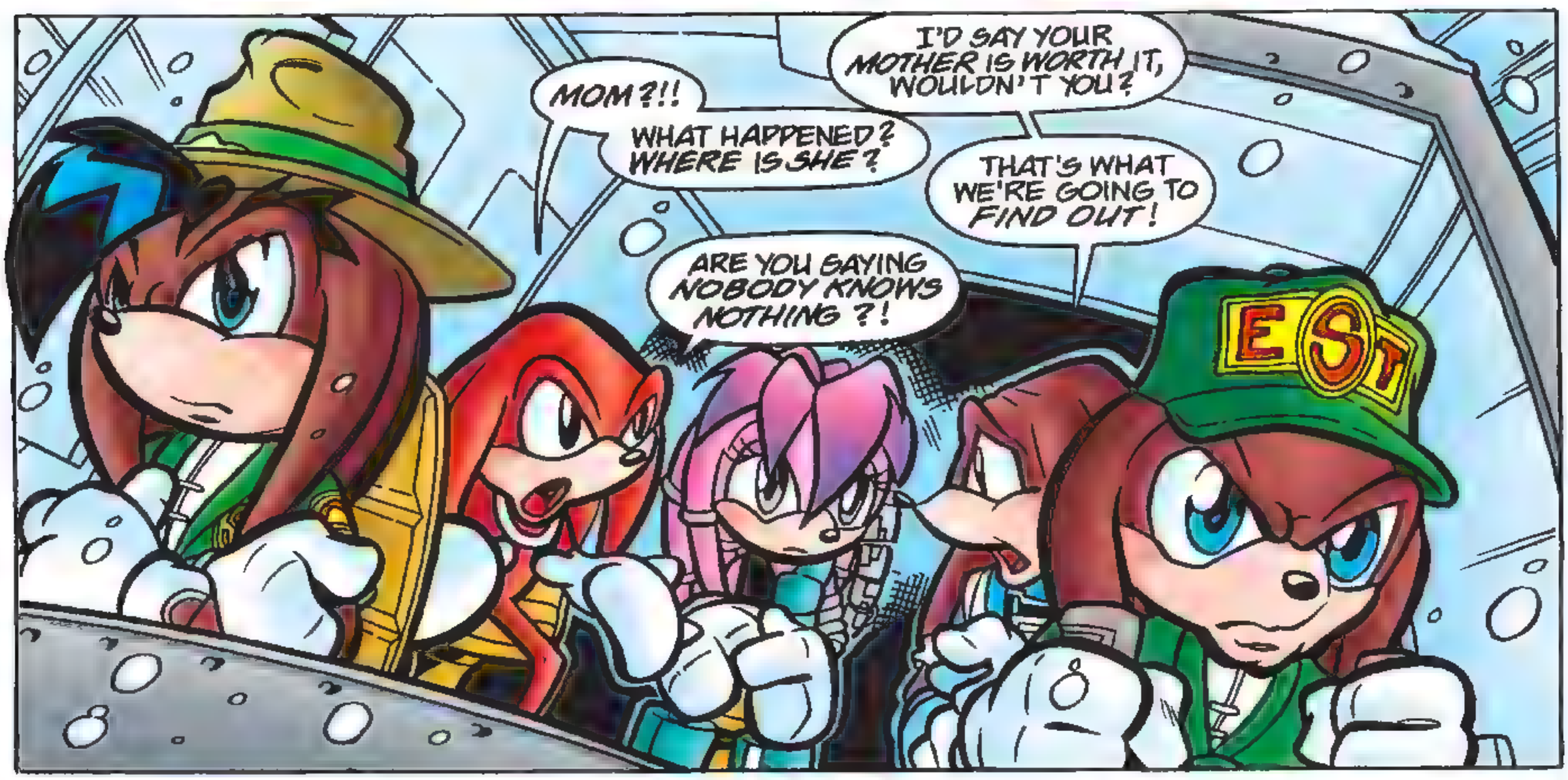

"--I'D LIKE TO HAVE A CONVERSATION INSTEAD OF STARTING WITH AN ARGUMENT!"
JULIE-SU!
ABOUT TIME SOMEONE GOT HERE!
CONSTABLE REMINGTON'S PEOPLE CAME AS QUICK AS THEY COULD!
HOW'S THE BABY?

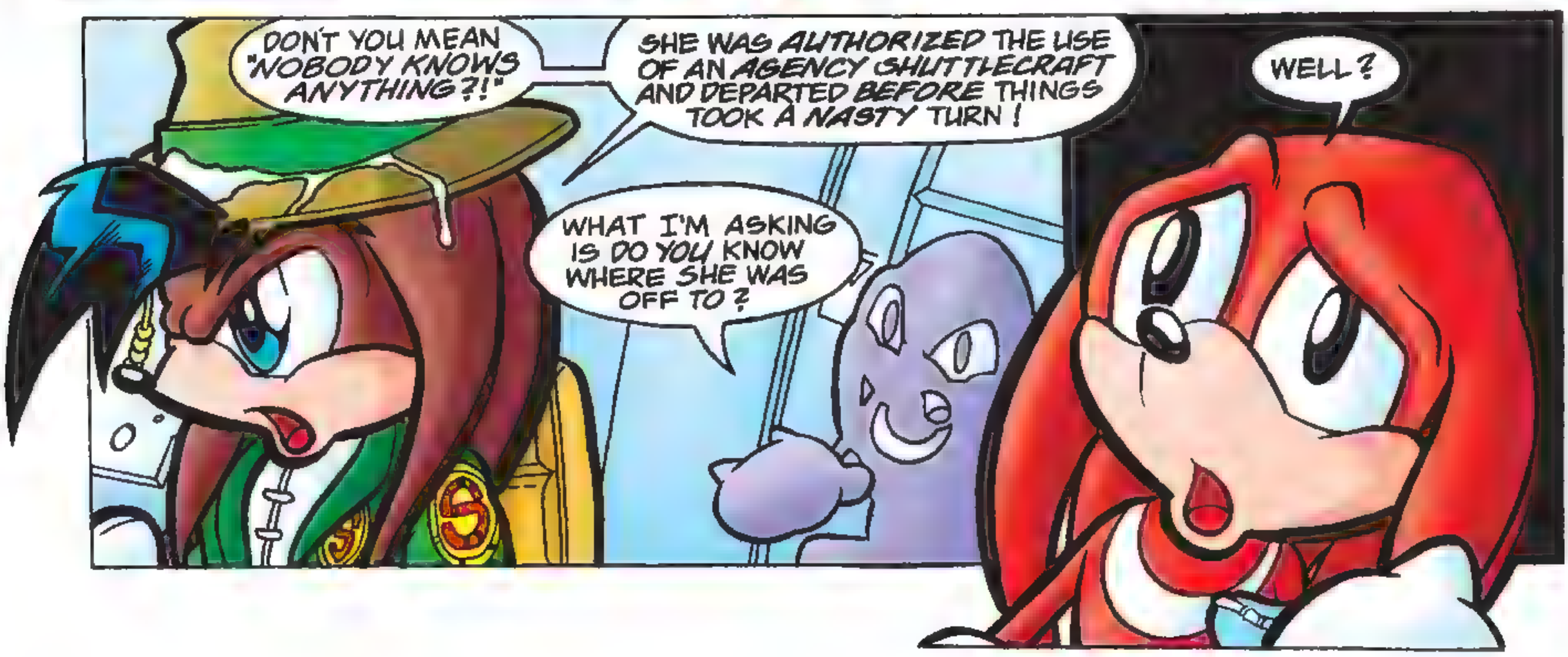

THE BABY'S DOING FINE!
IT'S ME I'M NOT SO SURE OF!
I'LL TAKE HER NOW, GUARDIAN!
IF YOU'LL FOLLOW OFFICER FLINT--
"--HE'LL ESCORT YOU TO THE CONSTABLE!"
THEY SAID YOU WANTED TO SEE ME!
GET IN, THE BOTH OF YOU!


HELLO, M'DEAR!
KNUCKLES!
HI.
SIR!
IS EVERYONE SET BACK THERE?

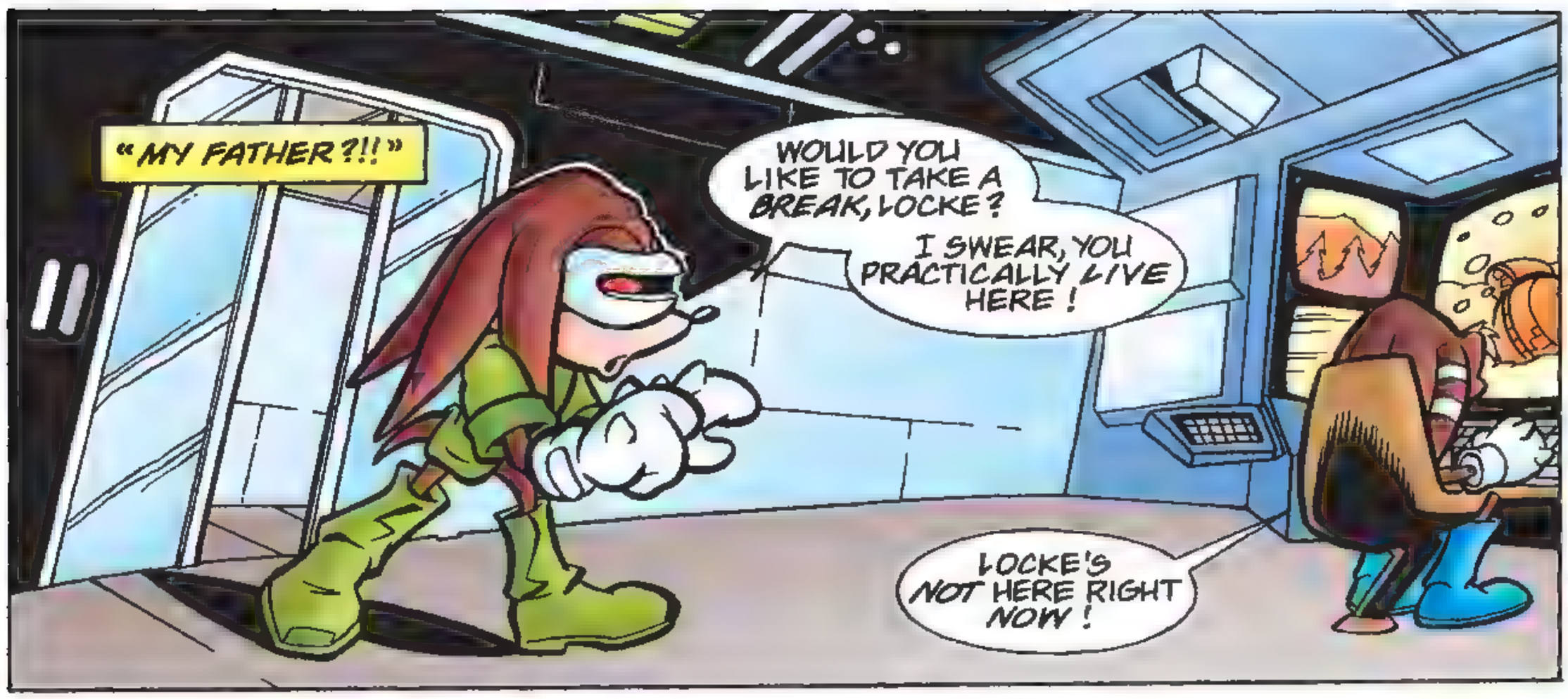

TAKE US TO THE HOVER-PORT, DRIVER!
OUR SHUTTLE IS WAITING!

WHAT'S THE RUSH, CONSTABLE?
WHAT COULD POSSIBLY BE WORTH RISKING OUR NECKS FLYING UNDER THESE CONDITIONS?


MOM?!!
WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE IS SHE?
I'D SAY YOUR MOTHER IS WORTH IT, WOULDN'T YOU?
THAT'S WHAT WE'RE GOING TO FIND OUT!
ARE YOU SAYING NOBODY KNOWS NOTHING?!
EST


DON'T YOU MEAN "NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING?!"
SHE WAS AUTHORIZED THE USE OF AN AGENCY SHUTTLECRAFT AND DEPARTED BEFORE THINGS TOOK A NASTY TURN!
WHAT I'M ASKING IS DO YOU KNOW WHERE SHE WAS OFF TO?
WELL?

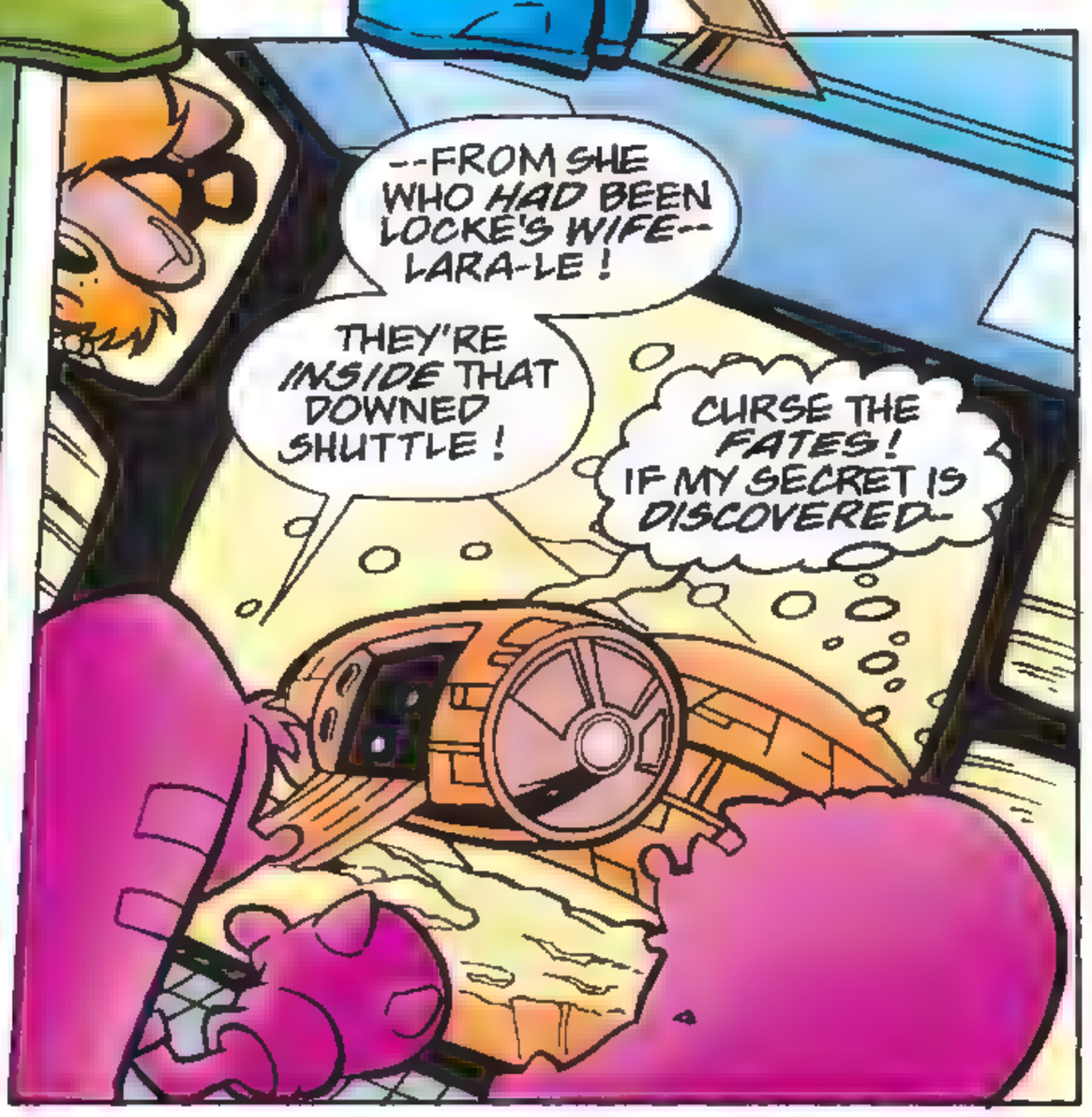
DON'T LOOK AT ME, KNUCKLES!
I'M AS MUCH IN THE DARK AS YOU!
CONSTABLE?
SHE TOOK OFF FOR THE FORBIDDEN ZONE!
THE FORBIDDEN ZONE?!!
WHY?
WHAT COULD POSSIBLY BE SO IMPORTANT THERE FOR MY MOTHER TO GO OFF ON HER OWN?
CONSTABLE REMINGTON?
SHE WENT TO MEET WITH YOUR FATHER, GUARDIAN!

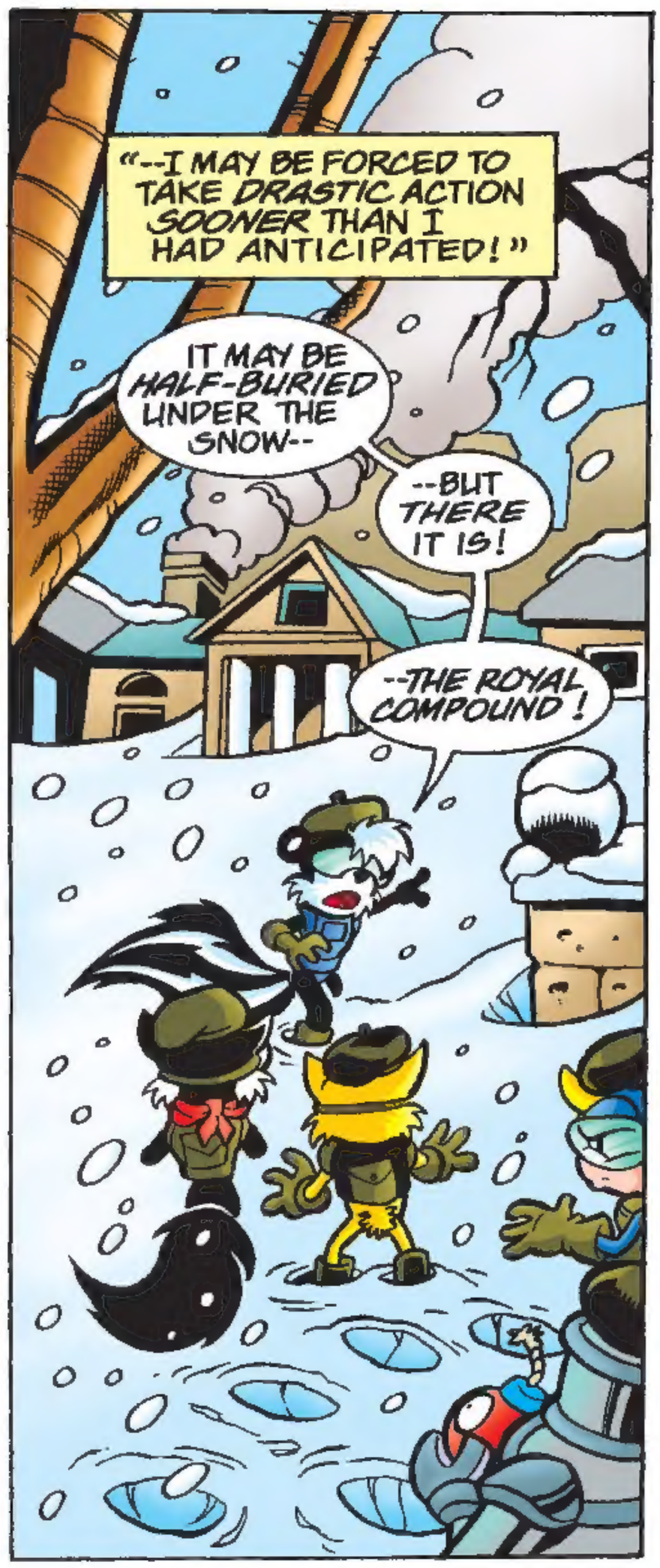

"MY FATHER?!!"
WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE A BREAK, LOCKE?
I SWEAR, YOU PRACTICALLY LIVE HERE!
LOCKE'S NOT HERE RIGHT NOW!

HE'S NOT?

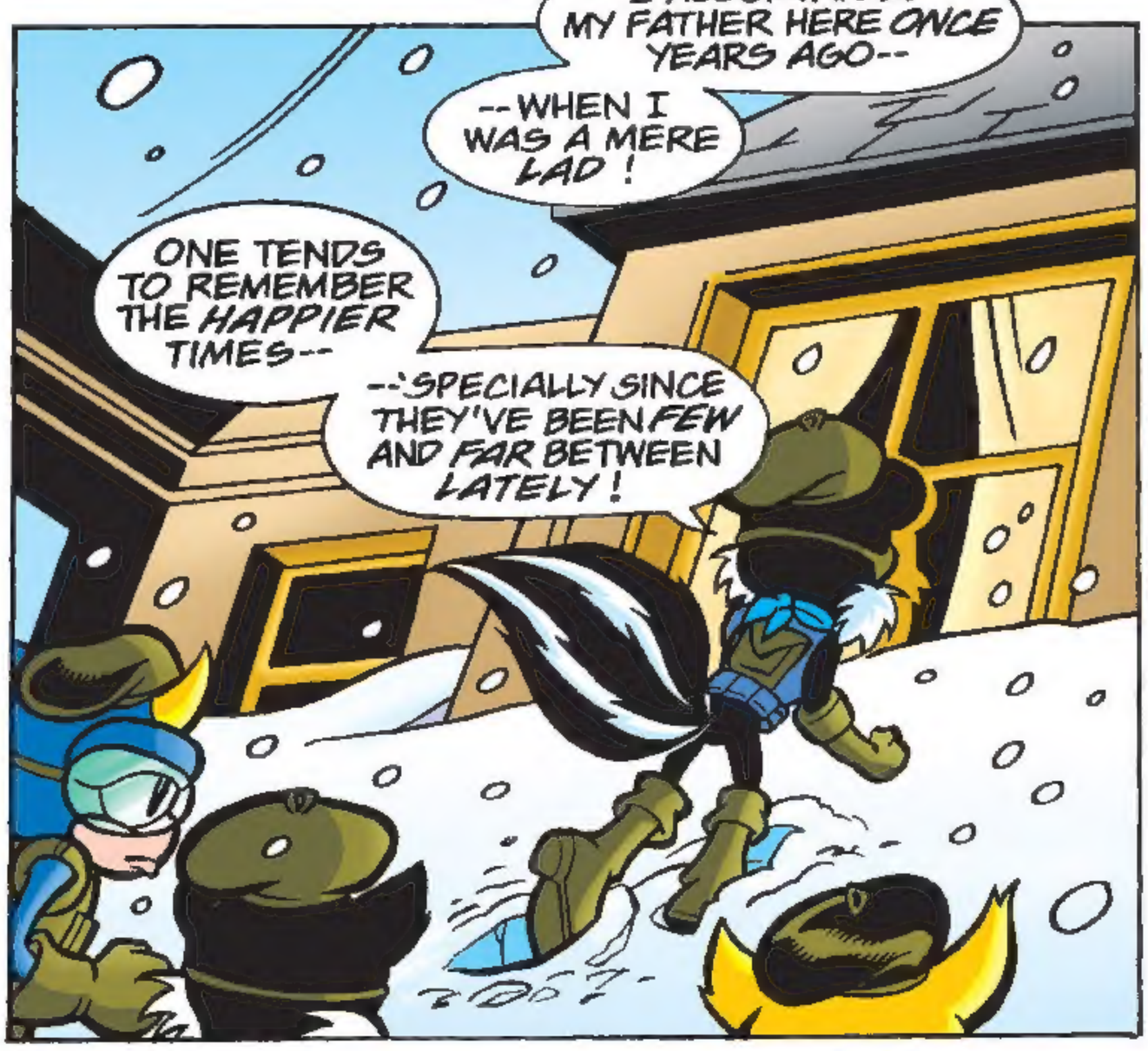
I GUESS HE REALIZED HE NEEDED A BREAK!
NOT AT ALL!
HE LEFT THE COMPLEX!

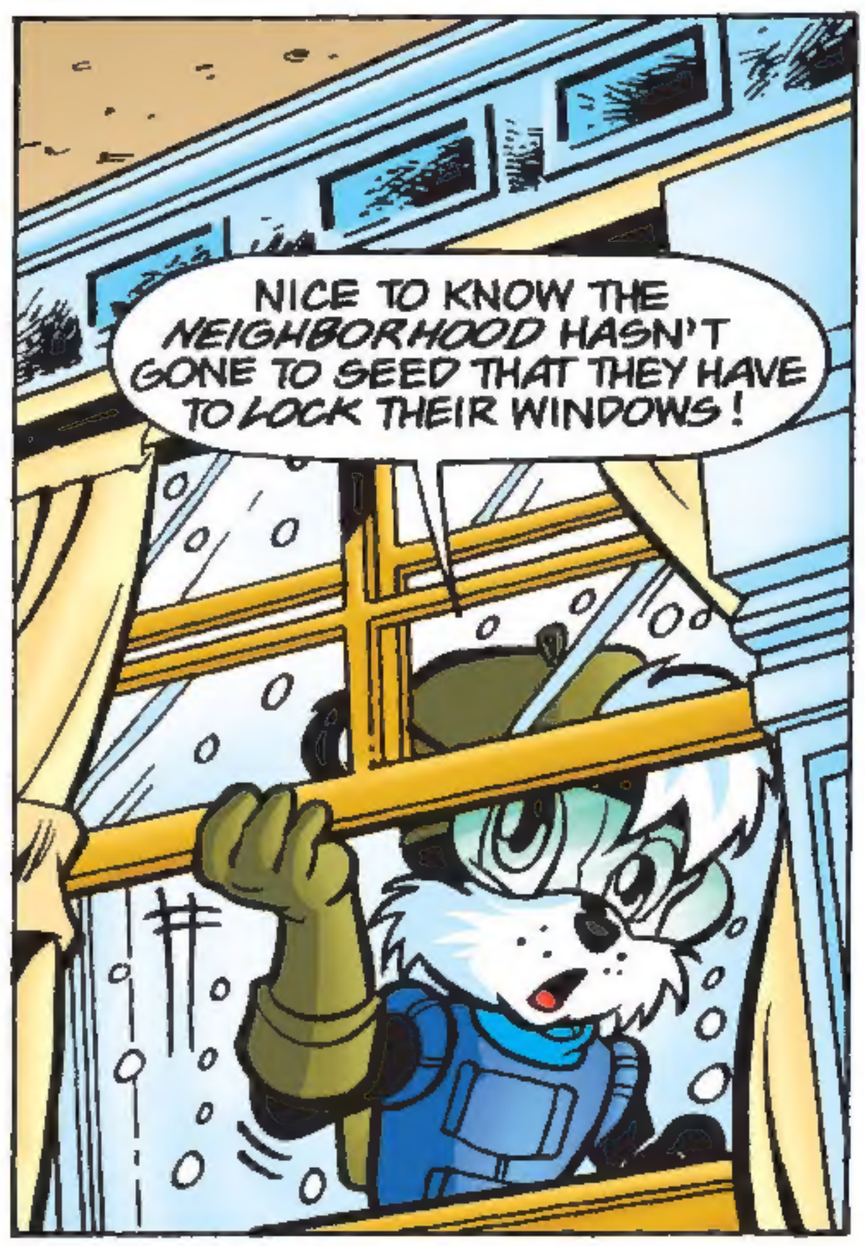
HE DID?
WHATEVER FOR?
EMERGENCY DISTRESS CALL--


--FROM SHE WHO HAD BEEN LOCKE'S WIFE--LARA-LE!
THEY'RE INSIDE THAT DOWNED SHUTTLE!
CURSE THE FATES! IF MY SECRET IS DISCOVERED--

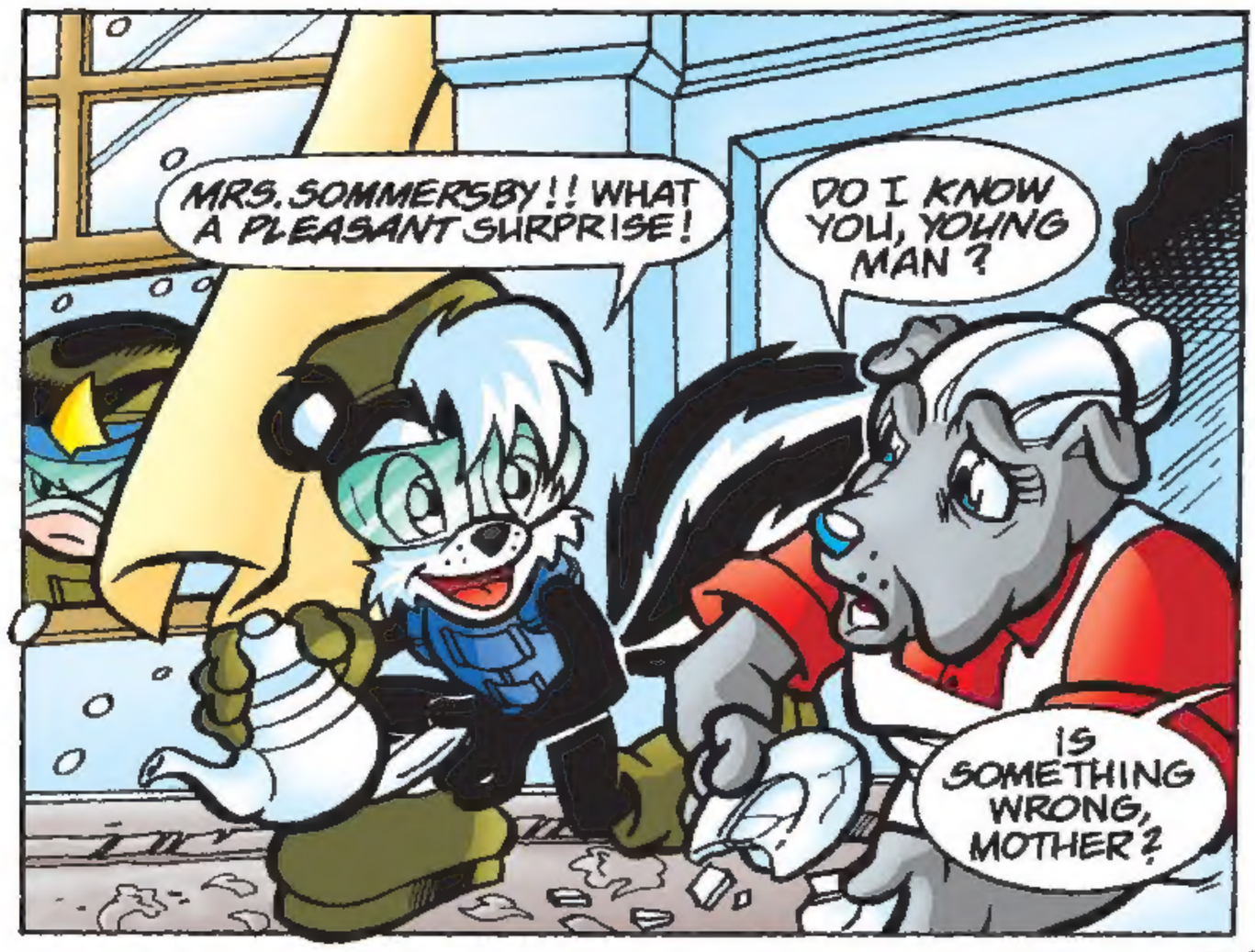

"--I MAY BE FORCED TO TAKE DRASTIC ACTION SOONER THAN I HAD ANTICIPATED!"
IT MAY BE HALF-BURIED UNDER THE SNOW--
--BUT THERE IT IS!
--THE ROYAL COMPOUND!

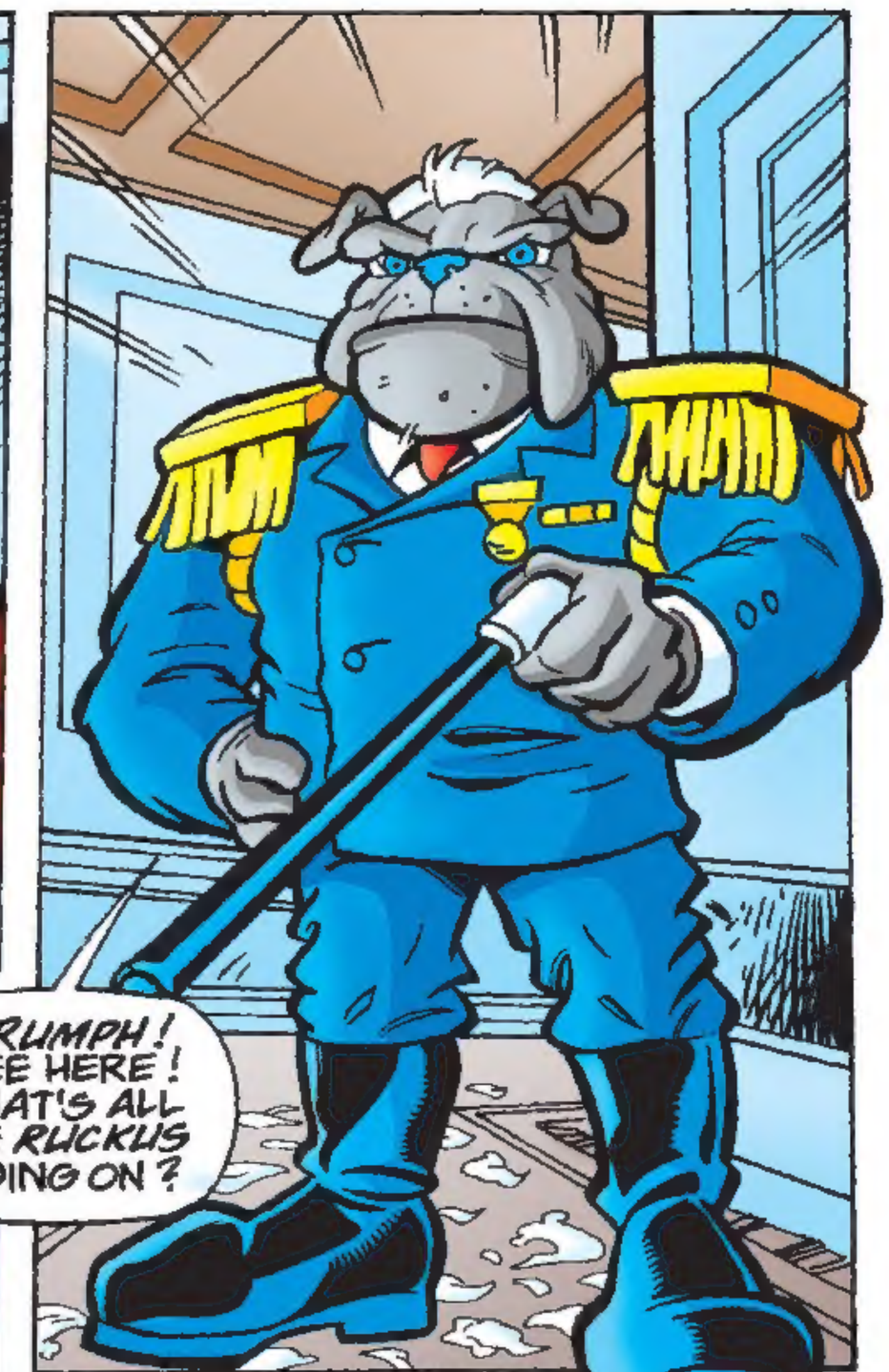
HOW DO YOU KNOW?

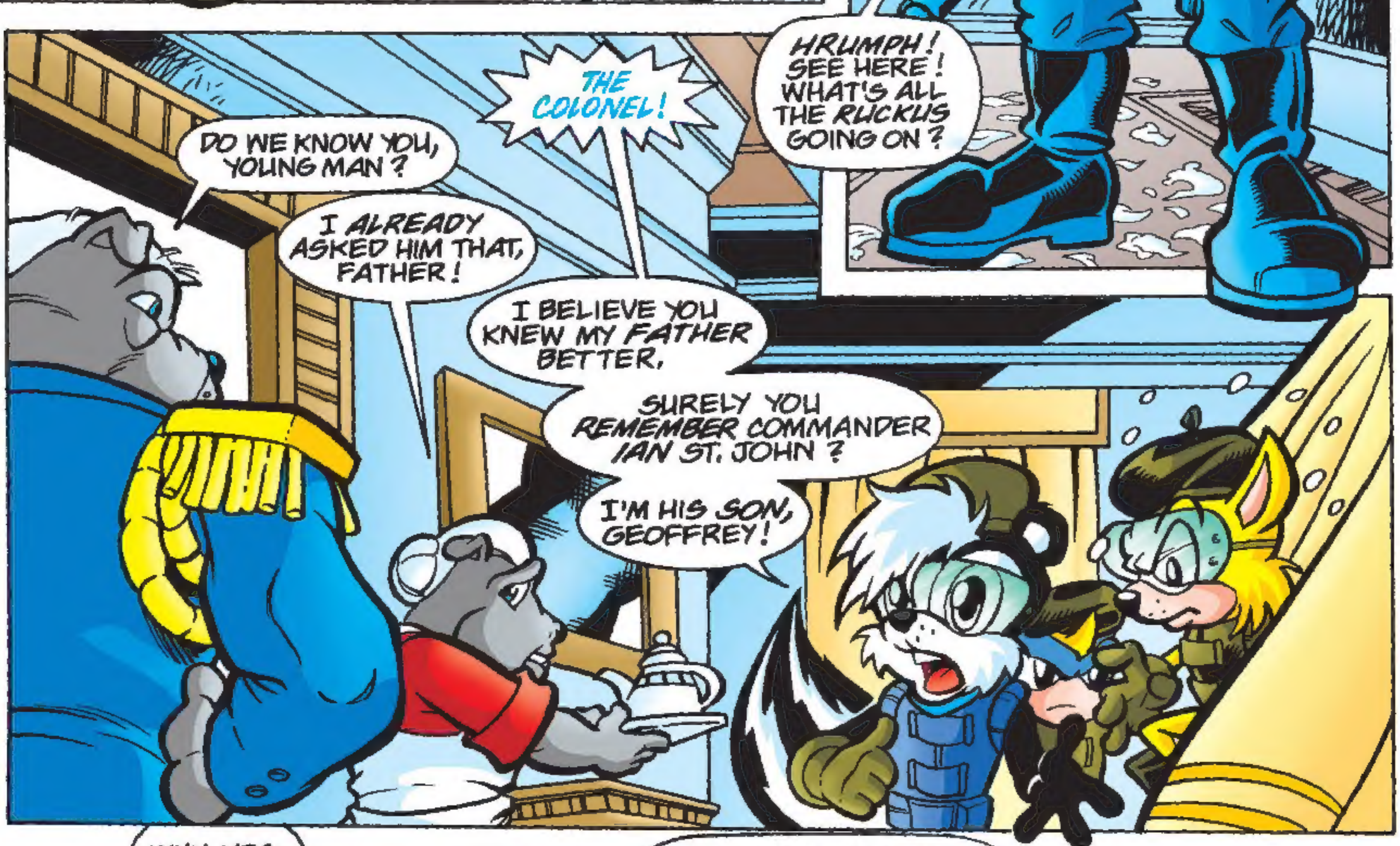

I ACCOMPANIED MY FATHER HERE ONCE YEARS AGO--
--WHEN I WAS A MERE LAD!
ONE TENDS TO REMEMBER THE HAPPIER TIMES--
--SPECIALLY SINCE THEY'VE BEEN FEW AND FAR BETWEEN LATELY!

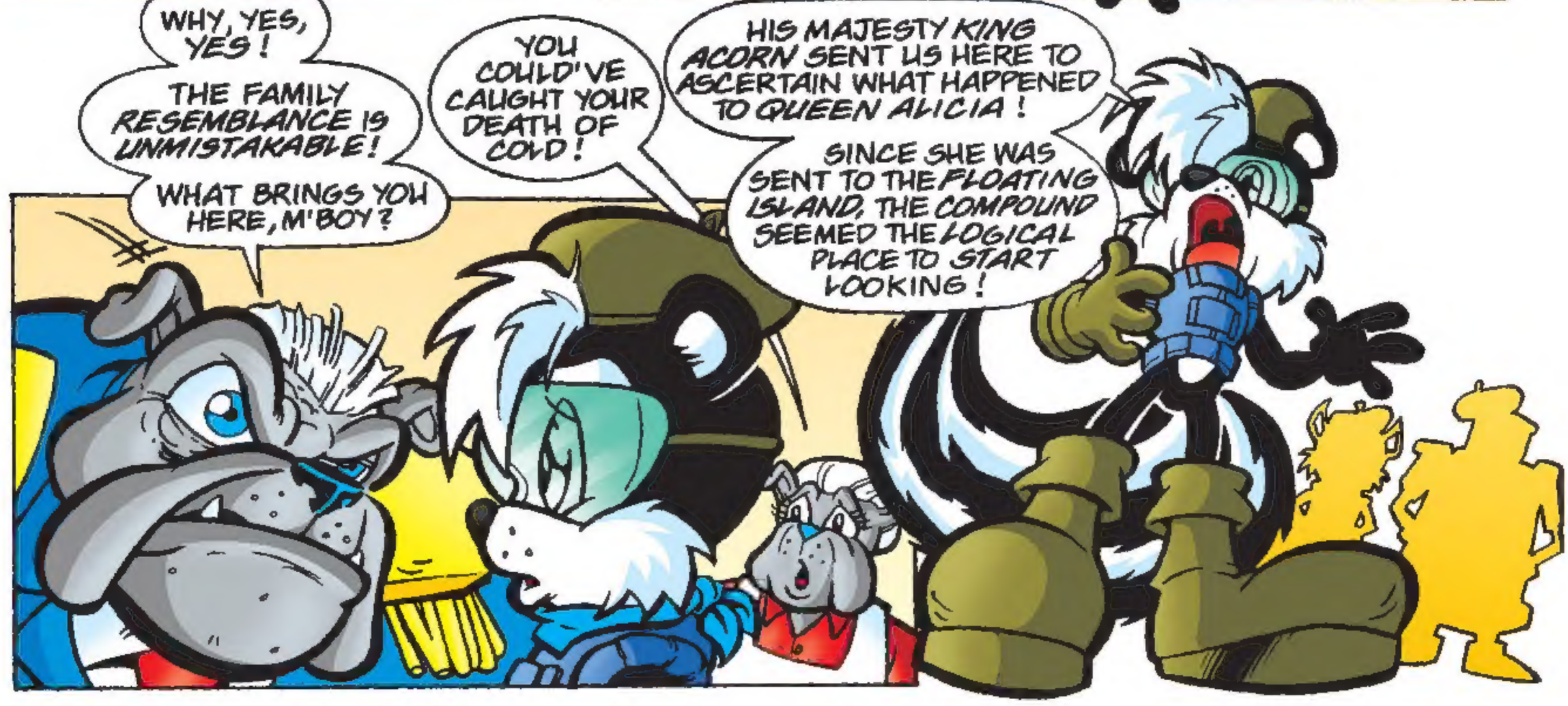

NICE TO KNOW THE NEIGHBORHOOD HASN'T GONE TO SEED THAT THEY HAVE TO LOCK THEIR WINDOWS!

NO SIGN OF ANYONE--OOPS!
SPOKE TOO SOON!
OH, MY!
KRAASH!


MRS. SOMMERSBY!! WHAT A PLEASANT SURPRISE!
DO I KNOW YOU, YOUNG MAN?
IS SOMETHING WRONG, MOTHER?


HRUMPH! SEE HERE! WHAT'S ALL THE RUCKUS GOING ON?


THE COLONEL!
DO WE KNOW YOU, YOUNG MAN?
I ALREADY ASKED HIM THAT, FATHER!
I BELIEVE YOU KNEW MY FATHER BETTER,
SURELY YOU REMEMBER COMMANDER IAN ST. JOHN?
I'M HIS SON, GEOFFREY!


WHY, YES, YES!
THE FAMILY RESEMBLANCE IS UNMISTAKABLE!
WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE, M'BOY?
YOU COULD'VE CAUGHT YOUR DEATH OF COLD!
HIS MAJESTY KING ACORN SENT US HERE TO ASCERTAIN WHAT HAPPENED TO QUEEN ALICIA!
SINCE SHE WAS SENT TO THE FLOATING ISLAND, THE COMPOUND SEEMED THE LOGICAL PLACE TO START LOOKING!

DID SOMEONE MENTION MY MOTHER?
WHO--?
To Be Continued...

PRO ART BY
FORMER REN & STIMPY ARTIST
MIKE KAZALAH!
COLOR IN & ENJOY.
25¢
MK